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THE NYON CONFERENCE:
A CASE STUDY
IN ANGLO-ITALIAN RELATIONS IN THE 1930S

BY

WILLIAM C. MILLS

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Abstract

For the past fifty years, the history of Great Britain in the inter-war period has proved to be a fertile area of study for a wide range of historians. The scope of their studies has continually expanded as additional government files have been opened to researchers and as many private collections became available for examination.

As the accessibility of records steadily improved in Britain, a parallel development occurred in those European countries which had also played important roles in the critical inter-war years. Unfortunately, those writing British history have tended to neglect the portions of the European records referring to British topics; and nowhere is this neglect of major European sources more apparent than with respect to Italy.

This thesis is, therefore, an attempt to start to fill in the gap between the British and Italian records. In order to do so, I have taken an event in the summer of 1937 in which both countries were involved—the Nyon Conference—and have examined the circumstances that led to the conference being held, the developments at the conference, and its aftermath. This thesis draws on primary source material from government and private records in Britain and Italy, supplemented by published French and German documents. By comparing the British and Italian documents, and using the published French and German accounts as cross references, a more comprehensive understanding of European diplomacy in the 1930s can be developed. Obviously, only by being aware of the conflicting motivations and the decisions made in London and Rome can the subsequent actions of these governments be properly understood.

Therefore, the objective of this thesis is to re-evaluate the already well-used British documents and to present some original Italian records in order to challenge past interpretations of the Nyon Conference within the framework of Anglo-Italian relations in the 1930s.

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Reference Sources in Notes

ACS: Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome:

(SPD: Segretaria particolare del Duce)

(CR: Carteggio riservato)

ASME: Archivio Storico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Rome:

(SAP: Serie affari politici)

(US: Ufficio Spagna)

(SRD: Serie delle rappresentanze diplomatiche, Londra, 1937)

AVON: The Avon Papers, The University of Birmingham Library

CHT: The Chatfield Papers, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich

DBFP: Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, Second series

DDF: Documents Diplomatiques Français, 1932-1939, Deuxième Serie

DGFP: Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945, Series D

H. C. Deb.: Parliamentary Debates, Official Record, House of Commons

HNKY: The Hankey Papers, Churchill College, Cambridge

LP: Ciano's Lisbon Papers, Foreign and Commonwealth Office Library, London

NC: The Chamberlain Papers, The University of Birmingham Library

PHPP: The Phipps Papers, Churchill College, Cambridge

PRO: The Public Record Office, Kew:

(ADM 116: Admiralty correspondence)

(CAB 23: Cabinet conclusions)

(CAB 24: Cabinet papers)

(FO 371: Foreign Office correspondence)

(FO 800: Ministers and Officials: Private collections)

(PREM 1: Premier's office correspondence)

STRN: The Strang Papers, Churchill College, Cambridge

T'WOOD: The Templewood Papers, University Library, Cambridge

Chapter One

The Years of Apathy

European diplomatic records of the 1930s provide clear evidence of the consistent effort made by the democracies to come to terms with the increasingly powerful fascist governments in Germany and Italy. Rather than acting decisively when they still had an opportunity to do so, Great Britain and France chose instead to follow a policy of appeasement. Ultimately this led to a series of strategic and moral retreats by the democracies from 1935 to 1939 in the name of appeasement; thereby giving a pejorative meaning to a previously honourable foreign policy practice. It is this interpretation that gave rise to the subsequent condemnation of the British leaders as the "guilty men" who, out of a love of power, a moral weakness, a fear of fascism and communism, or individual incompetence, gave way in the face of German and Italian transgressions.[1] In doing so, it was argued, they risked their country's national interests and immorally bartered away the freedom of other nations in a vain attempt to maintain peace at any cost. While more recent studies have shown that the issues facing the British government were infinitely more complex than was acknowledged by the government's critics at the time, the fact remains that while the circumstances may be debated, the consequences remain unchallenged. Nevertheless, within the framework of appeasement there is one notable example of the democracies apparently taking a stand against the fascist tide: the Nyon Conference in September, 1937, which forced Italy to abandon her submarine campaign in support of the Nationalist cause in the Spanish Civil War.[2]

Not surprisingly, Anthony Eden, the British foreign secretary and one of the key figures at Nyon, was the first to proclaim the significance of the Nyon Conference.[3] In a letter dated 14 September, 1937, the same day that the Nyon agreement was signed, Eden proclaimed the democracies' new decisive role in European affairs and their increased authority among nations.[4] This general view of the success at Nyon has been followed by a number of historians in recent years who have described it as "an emphatic declaration of western resolution,"[5] a "spirited response to these provocations,"[6] a "show of resolution,"[7] a

"brief rerouting of British foreign policy,"[8] a "severe warning to Mussolini,"[9] and the "only occasion . . . when the British and French Governments took firm action."[10] Other historians have looked at Nyon in a wider context, but they, too, see it as a stand against fascism. Jill Edwards in *The British Government and the Spanish Civil War 1936-1939* suggests that, despite some faults, Nyon represented the summit of Eden's policy towards the Axis powers, and she describes it as an "attempt to take swift and aggressive action" against the dictators.[11] Gerhard L. Weinberg, in his study of German foreign policy, views Nyon as the precursor of a firmer stand by Britain against the dictators, once she had the military power to assume the role.[12] This thesis will argue, however, that such evaluations substantially overstate Nyon's true significance as a stand against fascism, or as a break with the policy of appeasement. This view is supported by John F. Coverdale who notes that the cessation of the Italian attacks was not influenced by Nyon, and by Lawrence R. Pratt who suggests that the realities of the Nyon politics were not as Eden recalled them in his memoirs.[13] Moreover, a review of the pertinent British and Italian documents confirms that Nyon was not a deliberate challenge to the dictators in general, or to Italy in particular. Therefore, while Edwards is correct in viewing Nyon as the summit of Eden's career, the action taken at Nyon was far from "aggressive"; and Weinberg's anticipation of growing British determination is questionable given the great care taken by Britain to avoid offending Italy in any way. In fact, indications are that the conference was part of a continuing search by the British government to find an acceptable basis on which to begin conversations with Italy.

Neville Chamberlain's accession to power as prime minister increased the pressure on the Foreign Office to make new efforts to find common ground with the dictators. While initially aimed at Germany in an attempt to weaken the Axis partnership and isolate Italy, these efforts were soon focussed on finding an accommodation with Italy, following a friendly exchange of letters between the prime minister and the Italian Duce, Benito Mussolini, at the end of July, 1937. However, by concentrating on Italy the British lost their freedom of diplomatic manoeuvre. Thus even during the attacks by 'pirate' submarines in the Mediterranean in August, 1937, which the British knew to be of Italian origin, the basic goal

of accommodating Italy never changed, and every effort was made to ensure her presence at Nyon. Seen in this light, the Nyon Conference was not planned as a confrontation with Italy, but rather it was part of Britain's ongoing policy of appeasement. This thesis will demonstrate that British foreign policy in the summer of 1937 was designed to draw Italy into the British camp, and it will further show that the Nyon Conference was structured to avoid any confrontation with Italy that would have complicated this principal objective.

I

In order to place the Nyon Conference in its proper context, it is necessary to examine the state of Anglo-Italian relations within the framework of political changes in Europe and Asia. It then becomes apparent that the deterioration of Britain's strategic position throughout the world made the accommodation of Italy an important British objective. Most politicians and a high percentage of the public in Britain in the 1930s were convinced that appeasement was both a logical and an honourable policy to use as a means of reducing the threat of war.[14] In its ideal conception, it was a "policy of recognizing and settling international disputes by means of rational negotiations, diplomatic bargaining and balanced compromise, avoiding recourse to war."[15] The only difficulty was that this policy is most effective in an "international society pervaded by reason, harmony of interests and historical optimism," which was a far cry from the conditions then prevailing in Europe.[16] Yet the more threatening these conditions became, the more necessary it seemed for the government to continue an appeasement policy, since the only alternative was assumed to be war.[17] Indeed, the British service chiefs in the 1930s consistently argued that the number of Britain's potential enemies—Germany, Italy, and Japan—had to be reduced in order to gain time for rearmament.[18] Thus, it was possible to justify the increasingly abject forms that appeasement took—from passively accepting the German occupation of the Rhineland in 1936 to appeasement's nadir in 1938, when Czechoslovakia's independence was bartered away for worthless German pledges. On the other hand, when Chamberlain spoke of a "double policy of rearmament and better relations with Germany and Italy,"[19] it is by no means certain that his government recognized rearmament as a vital ingredient of appeasement, or if recognized,

acted effectively to achieve the level of rearmament necessary to protect the nation. Indeed, it is hard to imagine that the prime minister would ever have asked if rearmament had progressed to a point that a stronger stand could be taken against the dictators. Rather, the question would surely have been whether or not appeasement had succeeded to the extent that the pace of rearmament could be reduced.

In any case, the policy of appeasement is difficult to evaluate on either an empirical or a theoretical basis. While it delayed the outbreak of war until 1939, there is no certainty that war would have occurred earlier if the democracies had adopted a more confrontational foreign policy. Certainly Britain and France could have thwarted Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia[20] in 1935 and had the military capability to confront Adolf Hitler, the German Fuhrer, during Germany's re-occupation of the Rhineland in 1936. Mussolini had acknowledged "that oil sanctions would have stopped the war inside a week," and a similar view was held by the British embassy in Rome.[21] The Rhineland situation is much less clear. Gerhard L. Weinberg refers to German plans for a fighting withdrawal if challenged, which implies that Hitler had accepted the possibility of war.[22] On the other hand, Anthony Adamthwaite argues that in 1936 the balance of military power lay in the hands of France and her eastern European allies, but her response was constrained because of her obligation to consult her Locarno allies—Britain and Italy—and the unwillingness of her general staff to challenge the German action.[23] But even if Mussolini and Hitler had been successfully challenged, to suggest that this would have toppled either dictator from power is speculation that cannot be proved. The most that can be said is that appeasement delayed war until 1939, thus giving Britain some opportunity to regain the position of power she had lost earlier. Yet even when appeasement was discarded in 1939, it was not because British military supremacy had been regained, but because the policy had failed in the eyes of the public.

The need for rearmament was recognized and accepted in principle by the government as early as 1935, but there was a basic difference between Eden and his colleagues as to how best to guarantee the time needed to rearm. Eden did not share the same sense of urgency, either militarily or diplomatically, as did, for instance, Sir Maurice Hankey, in his dual roles

as secretary to the Committee of Imperial Defence and to the cabinet.[24] In Eden's view, the service chiefs were politically motivated in their warnings that British military weakness made it imperative to reconcile the dictators; they were using foreign policy as a lever to speed up the rearmament program.[25] Therefore, rather than following the advice of the service chiefs to mollify the dictators, Eden preferred a "leisurely approach" to improved relations with Germany and Italy. This tactic would keep them guessing as to Britain's likely reaction in any given situation, until he was in a position to negotiate from strength.[26] In contrast, Hankey argued that, in view of the limitations placed on rearmament by the Treasury and public opinion, Britain's commitments, and especially her military obligations, must be severely restricted and her foreign policy must reflect her military weakness.[27] Eden lost this debate and, over his objections, the cabinet eventually accepted what they saw as the need to appease Britain's potential enemies.[28] This policy enjoyed support from the public who genuinely feared another war and from the Dominion ministers who for the most part encouraged Britain to reduce her European commitments and to avoid confrontations with the dictators that would risk war.[29] Other factors that contributed to appeasement's ready acceptance in Britain, particularly with reference to Germany, included sympathy for Germany because of the harsh treatment she had received under the Versailles Treaty; a perceived Anglo-German affinity; a general pro-German anti-French feeling on the part of many Britons; an awareness of Britain's inadequate defences; a loss of faith in the value of collective security under the League of Nations; a perception that Nazi Germany would serve as a bulwark against communism; and a notion of moral superiority on the basis of Britain's reputation as a country with a special, disinterested role in mediating European problems.[30]

By late 1935, however, Britain's concentration on Nazi Germany as the principal threat to European stability was shaken by a truculent change in Fascist Italy's previously co-operative behaviour. This was an unwelcome development for the government in London which had carefully nurtured the Italian connection and who had, from the beginning of Mussolini's regime in 1922, made a point of accommodating Fascist Italy among the major European powers. This acceptance of Mussolini's government reflected both the foreign

admiration generally shown for the new "law-and-order accomplishments of Fascism within Italy" and the friendship accorded to Mussolini by Sir Austen Chamberlain, when he held the post of British foreign secretary; in Chamberlain's mercantile phrase, Mussolini was "a good man to do business with."[31] The Duce had contributed to this somewhat complacent British view by co-operating in international affairs prior to the Stresa Conference in April, 1935. There had been signs of a change as early as July, 1932, however, when Mussolini resumed personal control of the Foreign Ministry in order to establish an aggressive style of fascist foreign policy and to reorientate Italy's national goals.[32] This was not only done to deflect domestic unrest at home, but also to revitalize the fascist revolution which had lost its momentum. Mussolini, in effect, turned to the themes of "militarism and empire" in order to kindle a new sense of "inspiration and idealism" among the people.[33] These changes produced a new style of Italian foreign policy whose *tono fascista* was more a reflection of the Duce's personal aggressiveness and day-to-day unpredictability than of any well thought-out plan.[34] Thus it became difficult for London either to understand or to cope with Rome's ever-shifting policies and demands.

Britain's problems with Italy's new diplomacy became clear at the Stresa Conference in April, 1935. The conference, initiated by Italy, was designed to establish a Stresa front against German rearmament and threats against Austrian independence. This was a critical consideration for Mussolini who wished to secure his Austrian frontier before he could risk a war against Abyssinia.[35] But the British delegation failed on two counts. Hoping to reach an agreement with Germany themselves, as they did two months later with the Anglo-German Naval Agreement, they did not fully support Italy and France in taking a strong stand against Germany's latest violation of the Versailles Treaty. Then when faced with the opportunity to restrain Mussolini from his obvious, but as yet undeclared, plan to attack Abyssinia, they chose not to act.[36] This failure of will gave Mussolini a tactical advantage which he fully exploited. It was no longer a matter of stopping Italian aggression. It became a question of trying to bribe Mussolini not to attack by offering him concessions in Abyssinia that he had no right to expect and the Anglo-French negotiators had no right to offer.[37] Even the

outbreak of the Italo-Abyssinian War in October, 1935, failed to produce a strong reaction from the British government. Only Eden, in his role at this time as minister for League of Nations affairs and in defiance of warnings from his cabinet colleagues to go slowly, fought hard at the League of Nations for trade sanctions against Italy.[38] The French government, headed by Pierre Laval, offered Eden only minimal support in an effort to preserve France's recently-signed Italian alliance.[39] The attempt to mute their responses reflected each government's search for a compromise between its international and domestic policies. The British government paid lip service to sanctions for fear of losing the November general election in which public support for the League was a major factor, while the French government offered token support as they did not wish to accept the ultimate blame for any failure of the League.[40] Laval's lukewarm response was also a measure of French disillusionment with British policies as a result of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement signed in June, 1935, which effectively broke the Stresa front and isolated France.[41]

With only hesitant support from its most powerful members, the League's efforts to stop Italian aggression were doomed from the start. Such sanctions as were imposed were largely ineffective in hampering the Italian war effort. The western democracies were unwilling to use either the strategic weapon of an oil embargo, or the tactical weapon of closing the Suez Canal to Italian shipping, which would have strangled Mussolini's supply route to East Africa. Curiously, it was Chamberlain who noted that Mussolini had "tied a noose around his own neck (at Suez) and left the end hanging out for anyone with a navy to pull."[42] Britain had the navy, but not the will; neither the cabinet nor the service chiefs were prepared to risk war in the Mediterranean in order to save Abyssinia. This left negotiation between Britain, France and Italy as the only option available to settle the dispute before the Italians won a clear-cut victory, but the democracies were now bargaining from weakness, not strength, and their problems were compounded by the sanctions. Applying the adage that 'possession is nine points of the law', Mussolini was increasingly disinclined to negotiate as his control of Abyssinia expanded. As a result, the proposed Hoare-Laval Agreement, drawn up by Britain and France in December, 1935, had to concede major territorial grants in Abyssinia

to Italy in an attempt to obtain Mussolini's acceptance.[43] When its terms became known publicly in London, however, it produced the "greatest explosion in foreign affairs in years" involving a wide spectrum of the public, including many government supporters, such as League adherents, *The Times*, younger members of the party, and even Austen Chamberlain, one of Mussolini's friends.[44] The British cabinet were forced to denounce the agreement, or forfeit their credibility, although Anthony Adamthwaite believes that without the public reaction in Britain, both the cabinet and Mussolini would have accepted the agreement.[45] Following the repudiation of the Hoare-Laval Agreement, further negotiations became increasingly futile until finally the war ended when the victorious Italian Army entered the Abyssinian capital of Addis Ababa in May, 1936.

The Abyssinian War "deeply estranged" the western democracies. Britain believed that France had proved unreliable, while the dismissal of the Hoare-Laval Agreement only reinforced French feelings of mistrust of the British.[46] Nevertheless, the major diplomatic rift occurred between Britain and Italy. Weinberg suggests that, despite London's restraint from taking any really effective measures against Italy, the imposition of even limited sanctions wounded Mussolini's vanity, and his anger was further aroused by the delays in the removal of sanctions following his triumph in Abyssinia.[47] Mussolini's dilemma was that, although angered by the British actions, he could not afford a complete break with Britain as that would leave Italy isolated if there were a German *Anschluss* in Austria. Therefore, he had to find a way to reach an accord with Britain that would confirm a state of parity between the two countries in the Mediterranean.[48]

Despite criticisms of her actions in Abyssinia, any Italian overtures would still receive a sympathetic hearing in Britain. And no one would welcome them more than the Admiralty in London who were vitally concerned with the weaknesses in their Mediterranean defences that had been exposed during the Abyssinian crisis.[49] Moreover, the Admiralty's concern with their over-extended forces was increased in March, 1936, by the German occupation of the demilitarized Rhineland. This unexpected breach of French defences placed more emphasis on the strategic importance of the British Home Fleet and reinforced the Admiralty's view that

"we must recover our relations with Italy" in order to maintain maximum naval strength in Home waters.[50]

II

The Rhineland occupation, a violation of the Locarno Treaties, also underlined Britain's reluctance to face the dictators. The French General Staff's unwillingness to act unilaterally against Germany was more than matched by the British cabinet's unwillingness to act under any circumstances.[51] The presence of an anti-communist fear was obvious in the simplistic reasoning of Stanley Baldwin, the British prime minister, who suggested that if France and the Soviet Union were to combine to defeat Germany, she would be sure to go bolshevik.[52] The public response in Britain and France that supported this act of passive appeasement is, however, understandable. What is less comprehensible is the inaction by the two governments, particularly since the Committee for Imperial Defence had prepared a study of the Rhineland's military value for Eden five weeks before the German coup.[53] Although this study had not been reviewed by cabinet when the Germans moved, the value of the Rhineland as an open road into Germany's industrial heartland in the event of war must have been recognized. While British inaction has been justified on the basis of her military unpreparedness, it does not alter the fact that a major strategic advantage was lost to the democracies which, in turn, produced adverse reactions from Belgium in the west to France's allies, Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union, in the east.[54] The Rhineland occupation also clearly demonstrated the degree to which Italy had complicated Britain's "general strategic posture" and weakened her position relative to that of Germany.[55]

Still other unsettling events were facing the government in London early in 1936—the spectre of communism had appeared in western Europe. A warning from the British ambassador in Moscow indicated that the Soviets were promoting the formation of popular front organizations to combat fascism, and he thought this was a line of attack "more likely to bear fruit in democratic countries."[56] These words quickly proved prophetic; between February and May, 1936, popular front governments were established in Spain, Greece and France. The popular front success in France shocked the British government who feared the

parallel growth of French and Spanish communism and caused Hankey to ponder the possibility of Britain throwing her lot in with Germany and Italy in order to confront the bolshevik menace.[57]

The degree to which a fear of communism affected the British government's decisions is not easily quantified and some sources may exaggerate its importance. Nevertheless, the indications that crop up in recorded comments and in contemporary references leave little doubt that this fear existed among the ruling class, the Conservative Party, the upper echelons of the civil service and the senior ranks in the navy. Thus a London journalist noted his perception that the cabinet were "terrified of Bolshevism," and a contemporary article commented on the "strange and unreal situation" when the interests of the ruling class clashed with their normal patriotism and their class interest prevailed.[58] This prejudice made the British cabinet more sympathetic to fascist causes than to what it perceived to be communist ones. While the fear of a communist revolution in Britain could realistically be discounted, the insular reaction 'against infection and the hand of war' from beyond the Channel ran very deep and was more responsive to communism than to fascism. This reaction was also reinforced, with respect to Spain, by an ignorance of the very real, yet subtle, distinctions among the competing Spanish factions following the popular front victory in February, 1936. Then the outbreak of the civil war so soon after the election caused all of these suspicions to be focussed on that government, which was quickly labelled 'Red' by its opponents, and this pejorative term confirmed the British conservatives' worst fears. This biased attitude became very apparent in the tragic judgements made with respect to the Spanish Civil War by cabinet members more influenced by class considerations and business interests than by politically moral questions.

The failure of the government in London to judge impartially the legal rights of the Spanish Republic in her crisis demonstrated the true lack of objectivity by reasonably objective men. Many British conservatives did not recognize General Francisco Franco's right-wing revolt against the new Spanish government on 17 July, 1936, in its true light—an attempt to halt the redress of centuries-old social and economic injustices. In their judgement

this was not an illegal revolt against a democratically-elected government; it was simply the restoration of traditional rule in Spain, based on the combined power of the major landowners, the army and the Catholic Church. This view predominated in the cabinet in London.[59] Yet beyond Whitehall, the war divided British society to a degree that is "hard to overestimate," and this division contributed greatly to Britain's inability to meet the growing dangers in Europe.[60] But despite the division in the country, it was an anti-communist attitude that guided the government in the first weeks of the war, and it was not until later, when German and Italian involvement became obvious, that the cabinet took into account the war's strategic implications.[61] The total misunderstanding of the complex conditions existing in Spain is captured in Baldwin's admonition to Eden that "on no account . . . must he bring us in to fight on the side of the Russians."[62]

Given the official anti-Republican attitude, it is not surprising that Britain immediately denied military aid to the legitimate government in the Spanish war, in contrast to Hitler and Mussolini who quickly approved military support for Franco. However, the manner in which aid was given and the reasons for giving it highlight the contrast between Italian self-deception and German foresight in matters diplomatic and military. Mussolini claimed that his only motives for intervention were to support a fascist regime and to keep the Soviets out of the Mediterranean.[63] In addition, diplomatic, religious and geographical motives have been cited for his decision.[64] On balance, Renzo De Felice's explanation that Mussolini's primary desire was to abort the development of any close link between the socialist governments in Spain and France and a Franco victory was the best means to achieve this result, seems the most reasonable.[65] This primary objective also had secondary advantages to Italy as the war could be used for domestic propaganda, it placed the British and French governments in difficulty, it stopped France from gaining territorial rights in Spain (highly unlikely, but Mussolini was concerned about the strategically-located Balearics), and Italo-German co-operation would be enhanced by their mutual support of Franco.[66] What Mussolini did not factor into his calculation was the eventual cost to Italy at home and abroad.

Germany's objectives were very different. She lacked Italy's subjective interests in the Mediterranean, but was determined (unlike that country) to reap the maximum benefits from any aid given.[67] Originally Hitler assumed that Germany could gain influence in Spain on the basis of a relatively small commitment to an early Franco victory, despite the fact that he had received an early warning that the war would be long with "corresponding heavy loss of life and property."[68] But the long war that developed was even better for German plans; it meant that she could field test her war equipment, she gained access to strategic Spanish minerals, the democracies were kept off-balance, and for her, too, the Axis bond was more firmly established in Spain.[69]

The only country prepared to assist Spain's popular front government in any meaningful way was the Soviet Union. Yet Spain was a diplomatic trap for the Soviets: they could not ignore the plight of the Spanish people, but by coming to their assistance they destroyed the image of the Soviet Union as the "proponent of peace and democracy rather than the exporter of revolution" that they were trying to sell to the western democracies.[70] Moreover, despite their growing ideological tie to the Spanish Republic, the war was not of vital interest to the Soviets. After an initial surge of support in an attempt to match the Italo-German efforts, other priorities intervened and supplies were soon reduced to a level that merely allowed the Republic to continue fighting.[71] A not unexpected consequence of the Soviet aid was that it provided further justification for Britain to deny assistance to the legitimate government in Spain.

The division in British society over Spanish issues provided a certain logic for the government's decision not to support either of the combatants. But this decision was also influenced by the desire not to oppose the German and Italian forces in Spain and to avoid political alignments with either side.[72] It was for this reason that Eden gratefully accepted a French proposal for a non-intervention scheme involving all European powers when internal criticism of the French government's support of the popular front in Spain threatened to split French society.[73] The most generous assessment that can be made of non-intervention is that it confined the civil war to Spain and it minimized the impact of the war on the domestic

scenes in Britain and France.[74] In addition, non-intervention served the British cabinet well; shielding the government from the worst of the opposition attacks.[75] The British Labour Party had several reasons for grudgingly accepting non-intervention. They feared that the right-wing opposition in France would bring down the socialist government if they continued direct aid to the Republic; that an open trade in arms would favour Franco; and that the conflict could spread beyond Spain's borders if controls were not imposed.[76] And even in the face of subsequent non-intervention violations and increasing Labour criticism, the British government maintained that it continued to act with the best of intentions and pointed out the lack of any other acceptable course of action. In early 1937, Eden still believed the policy to be the right one on the basis that any alternative would have risked war.[77] But Eden's rationalization did not change the fact that non-intervention was another form of appeasement. It forced the democracies to ignore the daily challenges offered by the dictators as they routinely flouted the non-intervention agreement by supplying military equipment and technical aid to Franco. Finally, Mussolini's decision in December, 1936, to send the first of many contingents of troops to join Franco's forces fighting in Spain made a total farce of non-intervention.

III

Mussolini's military commitment to a Franco victory emphasized how far he had departed from the policies of liberal Italy who would never have faced a confrontation with Britain.[78] But by 1936, open competition with the British was a risk Mussolini was prepared to take, particularly following London's "fumbling opposition" to his Abyssinian campaign.[79] Moreover, the Duce's appointment of his son-in-law, Galeazzo Ciano, as foreign minister on 10 June, 1936, was clearly intended to 'fascisticize' the Foreign Ministry and marked a "decisive shift in the direction of Italian foreign policy" towards the Axis alliance.[80] The outbreak of the war in Spain a month later placed Ciano in a position of power second only to that of the Duce. Following the dispatch of the first Italian troops to Spain in December, 1936, responsibility for all Italian operations in that country—*l'Ufficio Spagna*, the Spanish bureau—was taken away from the *Servizio Informazioni Militari* and turned over to the

Foreign Ministry. Here it came under Ciano's personal control.[31] Also under Ciano's direction, Italy carried out a two-pronged diplomatic campaign in late 1936: she tried to reach an accord with Britain and at the same time pushed even harder for an agreement with Germany.[32] While Italo-German relations strengthened in late 1936 into what became the Rome-Berlin Axis, modest gains were also made in Anglo-Italian relations.[33]

The most significant of these was the signing of the Anglo-Italian Gentleman's Agreement on 2 January, 1937, in which both countries agreed to maintain the *status quo* in the Mediterranean and to permit the free passage of shipping. Dismissed as an agreement that "attempted to resolve little and accomplished nothing," leaving many outstanding problems unresolved, it is also true that a meaningful resolution of problems could not have been achieved at that time without major concessions that neither was prepared to make.[34] This accord was as meaningless as the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of June, 1935, and just as valuable in terms of prestige for the other party. The British officially interpreted the agreement as one designed to "deprecate annexations and transfers of territory from one State to another," to have both governments pledge not to carry out such modifications, and to obtain Italy's assurance that she would preserve the integrity of Spanish territory.[35] But even this innocuous recognition of mutual interests was of great value to Italy, despite Eden's attempts to make Britain's commitment as restricted as possible.[36]

By that time, any agreement with Britain was a coveted prize for Mussolini. Not only did it add to Italy's prestige by recognizing her interests in the Mediterranean; it reduced her isolation and her need to depend on German friendship; it opened up possibilities for more comprehensive negotiations; it increased Italy's standing with other Mediterranean nations that had backed Britain's sanctions in 1935; and it stifled internal concerns with regard to Italy's closer ties with Germany and her increased involvement in Spain.[37] Mussolini, however, then showed his disdain for the spirit if not the letter of the agreement by dispatching more troops to Spain only days after it had been signed, effectively putting paid to the new understanding and embarrassing Eden since it appeared that the Duce used their negotiations to screen his military moves.[38]

But the perception that the agreement increased Italy's independence from Germany was quickly shattered in Italy by Hermann Goering's visit three weeks later. Whereas in the past the Duce had posed as the defender of Austrian independence, by 1937 he was no longer able to do so because of Italy's troop commitments to Abyssinia, to Libya and, above all, to Spain. Therefore, during his meeting with Goering in Rome on 23 January, 1937, the Duce was unable to resist the pressures brought to bear by Germany over the question of Austria's status. As the representative of the now senior partner in the Rome-Berlin Axis, Goering lost no time in asserting Germany's position with respect to Austria. He forced Mussolini to acknowledge German suzerainty over Austria, and the Duce had to concede that Italy was no longer bound to maintain its "watch on the Brenner" to protect Austrian independence.[89] Little wonder that the Italians would "regard the meeting as an unhappy one."[90] Yet in the face of this growing German pressure and despite the benefits gained by Italy's new accord with Britain, the Duce quickly resumed his campaign of vituperation against her.[91] This apparent contradiction is best understood within the context of fascist foreign policy. Friendliness was equated with weakness, and so Mussolini continued to use his *tono fascista* in the expectation of gaining by bluster what he might not win by negotiation.[92]

There was no question that diplomatic bluff and bluster had already succeeded in Abyssinia, the Rhineland and Spain. And the way in which the dictators had moved from success to success, could not help but weaken the "morale and cohesion of the liberal states."[93] Mussolini's decision to send more troops to Spain and his increased verbal attacks on the democracies ensured that the Gentleman's Agreement failed to ease the tensions between Italy and Britain. The war in Spain also produced divisions in the British cabinet, mainly involving Anthony Eden. In early 1937, his main concern was to increase the naval protection for British merchant ships trying to reach Basque ports in northern Spain in the face of Franco's navy.[94] And the extent of his alienation from his colleagues can be measured by the fact that he now hoped for a Republican victory.[95] In his efforts to establish a balance in Britain's approach to the Spanish antagonists, Eden was constantly opposed by Sir Samuel Hoare and the Admiralty who continued to espouse the Nationalist cause as the only answer to the

communist menace they perceived to exist in Spain.[96] Thus in the last days of Stanley Baldwin's government, there was no clear-cut policy with respect to Spain, except to support the discredited non-intervention scheme. Comprehensive accords were sought with Germany and Italy, although their Spanish involvement cast a shadow over that possibility. And in the equally critical Far East, the Treasury and the Foreign Office were foolishly competing in a vain attempt to find a basis for an agreement with Imperial Japan.[97]

It was amid this atmosphere of confusion and internal bickering that Stanley Baldwin stepped down from office. He had retained the prime ministership well beyond the time in which he was still capable of effectively performing his duties as leader. Not fully recovered from his illness in 1936, he had stayed on in order to deal with the abdication crisis early in 1937, and then remained in office to preside over the coronation. But his government drifted with little direction or impetus; and the British people were more than ready for a change that would restore a sense of vigour and purpose to national affairs. Such were the expectations of things to come under the efficient leadership of Neville Chamberlain as prime minister.

Notes

1 See "Cato" (Michael Foot, Frank Owen and Peter Howard), *Guilty Men* (London, 1940). This book was the first extensive presentation of the theory that the British leaders in the late 1930s were the "guilty men" who had betrayed the nation. The ready market for this theory in the early war years is indicated by the book's twelve printings in its first month of publication.

2 The town of Nyon, a short distance from Geneva, had been selected as the conference site in deference to Italy's wish to avoid Geneva because of her disagreement with the League of Nations over her invasion of Abyssinia. (Arnold J. Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs 1937*, Vol. II (London, 1938), pp. 344-345.)

3 The other key figures at Nyon were Yvon Delbos and Maxim Litvinov, the foreign ministers respectively of France and the Soviet Union.

4 The Earl of Avon, *The Memoirs of Anthony Eden: Facing the Dictators* (Boston, 1962), p. 528.

5 Norman Rose, "The Resignation of Anthony Eden," *The Historical Journal*, 25, 4, 1982, p. 916.

6 Willard C. Frank, Jr., "The Spanish Civil War and the Coming of the Second World War," *The International History Review*, 9, 3, 1987, p. 393.

7 Stephen Roskill, *Hankey: Man of Secrets*, III, *1931-1963* (London, 1974), p. 269.

8 Margaret George, *The Warped Vision: British Foreign Policy 1933-1939* (Pittsburgh, 1965), p. 108.

9 David Carlton, *Anthony Eden, A Biography* (London, 1981), p. 110.

10 K.W. Watkins, *Britain Divided: The Effects of the Spanish Civil War on British Political Opinion* (London, 1963), p. 80.

11 Jill Edwards, *The British Government and the Spanish Civil War 1936-1939* (London, 1979), p. 127.

12 Gerhard L. Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany*, Vol. II, *Starting World War II 1937-1939* (Chicago, 1980), p. 112.

13 John F. Coverdale, *Italian Intervention in the Spanish Civil War* (Princeton, 1975), p. 316; and Lawrence R. Pratt, *East of Malta, West of Suez: Britain's Mediterranean Crisis, 1936-1939* (Cambridge, 1975), p. 89.

14 John Charmley, *Duff Cooper: The Authorized Biography* (London, 1986), p. 106. There were contemporary critics of appeasement, however, who wrote with much passion, such as Norman Angell, *Peace with the Dictators?* (London, 1938), and somewhat later, Lord Robert Cecil, *A Great Experiment* (London, 1941) who described appeasement as "a policy of placating your enemies by sacrificing your friends." (p. 275.)

15 Reinhard Meyers, "British Imperial Interests and the Policy of Appeasement," *The Fascist Challenge and the Policy of Appeasement* (London, 1983), p. 340.

16 Ibid.

17 Criticism of the British government's failure to consider alternatives to appeasement can be found in William R. Rock, "British Appeasement (1930's): A Need for Revision?", *South Atlantic Quarterly,* 78, 3, 1979, pp. 298-301.

18 Carlton, *Eden,* p. 93.

19 Keith Middlemas, *Diplomacy of Illusion: The British Government and Germany, 1937-1939* (London, 1972), p. 58. The questions of whether appeasement was effectively used to gain time for rearmament and whether the Treasury was correct in restraining the rearmament program remain open to debate. For the argument that a true rearmament program was not instigated until early 1939, see Brian Bond, *British Military Policy between the Two World Wars* (Oxford, 1980), pp. 304-305. Francis A. Coghlan, "Armaments, Economic Policy and Appeasement. Background to British Foreign Policy, 1931-1937," *History,* 57, 190, 1972, pp. 205-216 *passim,* supports appeasement as a policy, but notes the slow pace of rearmament and the public opposition to it. The Treasury's restraint of rearmament for economic reasons is supported by Paul Kennedy, "Strategy vs Finance in Twentieth-Century Great Britain," *The International History Review,* 3, 1, 1981, pp. 44-61 *passim*; and is criticized in Middlemas, *Diplomacy,* pp. 81-82. Bond, in *Military Policy,* gives a more balanced assessment of the Treasury's role on pp. 135-136, and especially on pp. 248-252.

20 The name "Abyssinia" is used in this study instead of the modern "Ethiopia" in order to conform to the name used in most records in the 1930s.

21 Denis Mack Smith, *Mussolini* (London, 1981), p. 198; and John Harvey, Ed., *The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey 1937-1940* (London, 1970), p. 137.

22 Gerhard L. Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany,* Vol. I, *Diplomatic Revolution in Europe 1933-36* (Chicago, 1970), p. 252.

23 Anthony Adamthwaite, *France and the Coming of the Second World War 1936-1939* (London, 1977), pp. 37 and 40.

24 Carlton, *Eden*, p. 93.

25 Ibid., p. 94. Eden's suspicion of political motivation was based on the alarmist views voiced by the service chiefs in 1935-1936 which he saw, at least partly, as a reflection of their own political preferences. Carlton suggests that these were based on their opposition to any form of "Wilsonian internationalism."

26 Carlton, *Eden*, pp. 93-95; and Middlemas, *Diplomacy*, p. 128.

27 Carlton, *Eden*, pp. 93-94.

28 Ibid.

29 For the public's fear of war, see Frank, "Spanish Civil War," p. 373, and Robert Boothby, *I Fight to Live* (London, 1947), p. 148. The importance of the Dominions in British policy decisions may be over-emphasized. Rainer Tamchina ("In Search of Common Causes: The Imperial Conference of 1937," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 1, 1, 1972, p. 100.) notes how Chamberlain manoeuvred the Dominions into a "position of passive acceptance of, rather than active participation in, British policies." This same point is made by David Carlton in "The Dominions and British Policy in the Abyssinian Crisis," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 1, 1, 1972, pp. 59-60.

30 Martin Gilbert, *The Roots of Appeasement* (London, 1966), pp. 142-143; and William R. Rock, *British Appeasement in the 1930s* (New York, 1977), pp. 41-52.

31 Alan Cassels, "Was There a Fascist Foreign Policy? Tradition and Novelty," *The International History Review*, 5, 2, 1983, pp. 257-258. See also Renzo De Felice, *Interpretations of Fascism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1977), p. 4, regarding the benevolent Anglo-Saxon view of Italian fascism; and an even better description is cited by De Felice from Herbert L. Matthews, *The Fruits of Fascism* (New York, 1943), p. 5, which describes how fascism seemed to be "a new, young and vigorous way of life" in the inter-war years. Austen Chamberlain's phrase is quoted by Neville Chamberlain in PRO: PREM 1/276, pp. 339-340, Chamberlain to Mussolini, 27 July, 1937.

32 Cassels, "Fascist Foreign Policy," p. 259. For a description of Mussolini's inability to act effectively in a diplomatic setting, his contempt for the negotiating process, and his distrust of his own ambassadors, see Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini il duce, Lo Stato totalitario 1936-1940* (Turin, 1981), pp. 344-345.

33 Ibid.

34 An argument could be made that Mussolini's unpredictability has to be balanced by his "sense of mission." Alan Cassels, "Fascist Foreign Policy," p. 262, speculates that the idea of Mussolini working to an imperial design somewhat undermines the "interpretation of the Duce as sheer opportunist, consistent only in his inconsistency." Nevertheless, there are too many instances of Mussolini's inconsistencies to discount seriously this element in his personality,

long-term plans or not.

35 Weinberg, *1933-36*, pp. 207-208; and Mack Smith, *Mussolini*, p. 293.

36 See Avon, *Memoirs*, pp. 200-201, for Eden's version of the lapse at Stresa which he blames primarily on Sir John Simon, the then foreign secretary. See also Pietro Quaroni, *Diplomatic Bags: An Ambassador's Memoirs* (London, 1966), pp. 94-99, for an anecdotal account of the Stresa Conference in which the author deplores Britain's unwillingness to support Italy and France in a stand against Germany's rearmament or her anticipated *Anschluss* in Austria. In addition, Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *La Décadence 1932-1939*, (Paris, 1979), pp. 136-137, comments on Mussolini's ambivalent approach at Stresa—very friendly to the French and imperious to the British. He also suggests that Simon refused to support Italy and France because a prior commitment had been made to Parliament not to accept any new obligations.

37 The responsibility for these fruitless efforts fell on Eden's shoulders and the negotiations soon gave rise to the myth that angry exchanges between him and Mussolini in their June, 1935, meetings poisoned the foreign secretary's subsequent dealings with Italy. This view is advanced by Rosaria Quartararo in *Roma tra Londra e Berlino: La politica estera fascista dal 1930 al 1940* (Rome, 1980), p. 336, in which she dismisses Eden's "presumed idealism" in favour of the theory that his personal antipathy for Mussolini stemmed from these meetings. This is also implied by Sidney Aster in *Anthony Eden* (London, 1976), p. 36, who notes that Eden "returned to London with a marked detestation of Mussolini," but Rose, "Resignation", p. 913, correctly observes how difficult it is to say whether Eden's attitude was based on "wounded pride . . . political calculation, or . . . high moral principles." Eden himself denied such claims, see Avon, *Memoirs*, pp. 247-257, and he is supported by Renzo De Felice in *Mussolini il duce, Gli anni del consenso 1930-1936* (Turin, 1974), p. 668, who discounts the story of a clash between Eden and Mussolini as fascist propaganda designed to discredit Eden's efforts to stand up to Italy. In addition, Pratt, *East of Malta*, pp. 71 and 87, argues that Eden's attitude towards Italy essentially reflected both British public opinion and his personal "resentment against upstart have-not imperialisms poaching on traditionally" British areas of influence. Finally, there is no mention of angry exchanges in a detailed account of these negotiations in C.J. Lowe and F. Marzari, *Italian Foreign Policy 1870-1940*, (London, 1975), pp. 272-283.

38 Aster, *Eden*, p. 38. In addition, see Avon, *Memoirs*, p. 269 and pp. 281-283, regarding warnings from Sir Samuel Hoare, then British foreign secretary.

39 Adamthwaite, *France*, p. 35.

40 Carlton, *Eden*, p. 68.

41 Weinberg, *1933-36*, pp. 215-216.

42 Maurice Cowling, *The Impact of Hitler: British Politics and British Policy 1933-1940* (London, 1975), p. 140.

43 The agreement was named after Sir Samuel Hoare, Britain's foreign secretary, and Pierre

Laval, the French prime minister.

44 A.J.P. Taylor, *English History 1914-1945* (London, 1965), p. 385. One result of the public's anger was that Anthony Eden replaced Hoare as foreign secretary.

45 Adamthwaite, *France*, p. 35.

46 Ibid., p. 36. However, see also Avon, *Memoirs*, pp. 429-431, for Eden's account of his warm reception by the newly-elected Léon Blum in May, 1936.

47 Weinberg, *1933-36*, p. 332.

48 De Felice, *Lo Stato totalitario*, pp. 343-344; and Rosaria Quartararo "Imperial Defence in the Mediterranean on the Eve of the Ethiopian Crisis (July to October, 1935)," *The Historical Journal*, 20, 1, 1977, p. 213.

49 For a discussion of the critical weaknesses in anti-aircraft and harbour defences, see Quartararo, "Imperial Defence," pp. 190-191. On the other hand, Admiral Sir William James, *The Sky Was Always Blue* (London, 1951), p. 184, claims that the Mediterranean fleet was a highly efficient weapon at that time and could easily have defeated the Italians, but they were denied their chance by the government whose judgement he questions. But James has a selective memory. He was the senior British naval officer who made concessions to the Italians in the naval talks in Paris in September, 1937, and he was, therefore, part of the group who appeased Italian ambitions in the 1930s.

50 Arthur Marder, "The Royal Navy and the Ethiopian Crisis of 1935-1936," *The American Historical Review*, 75, 5, 1970, p. 1352; and Roskill, *Hankey*, p. 224.

51 See Adamthwaite, *France*, p. 39, regarding the French reaction. Duroselle, *La Décadence*, p. 172, describes the British reaction as "neither taking any initiative, nor raising any obstacle."

52 Ibid., p. 38.

53 Roskill, *Hankey*, pp. 220-221.

54 Ibid., p. 226. Adamthwaite, *France*, p. 41, refers to these reactions. Jonathon Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security in Europe, 1933-1939*, (London, 1984), p. 98, indicates that the adverse reaction in the Soviet Union was recognized in France where the French Senate ratified the Franco-Soviet pact five days after the Rhineland occupation.

55 Pratt, *East of Malta*, p. 34.

56 Douglas Little, "Red Scare, 1936: Anti-Bolshevism and the Origins of the British Non-Intervention in the Spanish Civil War," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 23, 2, 1988, p. 293.

57 Ibid., p. 299.

58 The cabinet comment is from Kenneth Young, Ed., *The Diaries of Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart*, Vol. 1 (London, 1973), p. 380; and the ruling class is referred to in Kingsley Martin, "The 'United' Kingdom," *Foreign Affairs: An American Quarterly Review*, 16, 1, 1937, p. 121. Watkins, *Britain Divided*, p. 8, notes that Britain held commercial investments of forty million pounds Sterling in Spain. This would also influence her reaction to an assumed anti-capitalist Spanish Republican government.

59 Carlton, *Eden*, pp. 86-87; and Edwards, *British Government*, pp. 3 and 102.

60 Watkins, *Britain Divided*, pp. 10-12. For an account of how British resolve was weakened by the anti-war bias and the pro-Franco message promoted by British newsreels in the late 1930s, see Tony Aldgate, "British Newsreels and the Spanish Civil War,"*History*, 58, 192, 1973, pp. 60-63.

61 For an account of this anti-communist bias, see Edwards, *British Government*, p. 3. Spain's strategic significance is discussed by Watkins, *Britain Divided*, p. 5; and economic factors are considered in Robert H. Whealey, "Economic Influence of the Great Powers in the Spanish Civil War: From the Popular Front to the Second World War," *The International History Review*, 5, 2, 1983, p. 238.

62 Carlton, *Eden*, p. 86. According to Edwards, *British Government*, p. 101, not even the cabinet could match the Admiralty for its "consistently and emphatically anti-Republican" stance. For the critical reaction of Lord Chatfield, the first sea lord, to the murder of Spanish rebel naval officers by their loyalist crews (the Admiralty were "unfavourably impressed"), see David Carlton, "Eden, Blum and the Origins of Non-Intervention," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 6, 3, 1971, p. 42. It was too soon after the Royal Navy's 1931 mutiny at Invergordon for British officers not to feel some sense of unease at the thought of an unruly lower deck.

63 Mario Toscano, "L'asse Roma-Berlino—Il patto anti-comintern, La guerra civile in Spagna, L'Anschluss, Monaco," *La politica estera italiana: dal 1914 al 1943* (Turin, 1963), p. 204.

64 Mussolini's past frustrations in his attempts to gain influence in Spain are suggested as a factor in Alan Cassels, *Mussolini's Early Diplomacy* (Princeton, 1970), p. 215; pressure from the Vatican hierarchy is mentioned in Leo Valiani, "L'intervento in Spagna," *Trent'anni di storia italiana (1915-1945)* (Turin, 1961), p. 217; and the need for a friendly Spain to allow Italy an escape from her Mediterranean prison is suggested by Frank, "Spanish Civil War," p. 376. The rationalization by Count Galeazzo Ciano, then Italian foreign minister, that Mussolini intervened only to stop the spread of communism, with no other advantages in mind, is in Felix Gilbert, "Ciano and his Ambassadors," *The Diplomats 1919-1939*, Vol. 2 (New York, 1974), p. 521.

65 De Felice, *Lo Stato totalitario*, pp. 359. A similar explanation is in Franco Catalano, *L'economia italiana di guerra* (Milan, 1969), p. 20.

66 Ibid., pp. 359 and 368.

67 For concise summaries of Germany's involvement, see Frank, "Spanish Civil War," p. 377; Weinberg, *1933-36*, pp. 284-299; and Gordon A. Craig, "The German Foreign Office from Neurath to Ribbentrop," *The Diplomats 1919-1939*, Vol. 2 (New York, 1953/1974), pp. 429-431.

68 Weinberg, *1933-36*, p. 290. The perceptive warning to Hitler is in *DGFP*, III, No. 4, Schwendemann to Foreign Ministry, 23 July, 1936.

69 Ibid., pp. 288-290, 292, and 298; and Frank, "Spanish Civil War," p. 377.

70 Adam B. Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence: Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-1973* (New York, 1974), p. 244.

71 Whealey, "Economic Influence," pp. 241 and 245.

72 Edwards, *British Government*, pp. 35 and 101.

73 Little, "Red Scare," p. 303. The degree to which Britain brought pressure to bear on the French government to stop supporting the Spanish Republic is still debated, but the most likely answer is that while the key considerations "were almost certainly domestic," the knowledge that Britain did not approve of intervention "was sufficient to bridle the French." (Adamthwaite, *France*, p. 45.) See also, Duroselle, *La Décadence*, p. 318, for a discussion of the problems faced by the French politicians following the outbreak of war in Spain.

74 Weinberg, *1933-36*, p. 293.

75 Watkins, *Britain Divided*, pp. 92-93, quotes German despatches which accurately assessed the way in which the British government's support of non-intervention successfully deflected opposition attacks and helped to calm domestic misgivings in both Britain and France.

76 Trevor Burridge, *Clement Attlee* (London, 1985), p. 123.

77 Harvey, *Diaries*, p. 24.

78 Cassels, "Fascist Foreign Policy," p. 267.

79 Ibid., pp. 265 and 267.

80 Ibid., p. 265.

81 De Felice, *Lo Stato totalitario*, p. 370. Coverdale, *Italian Intervention*, pp. 165-166, gives a summary of the *Ufficio Spagna* organization. Weinberg, *1933-36*, pp. 291 and 299, reports that, unlike the Italians, the Germans administered their Spanish adventure through a special staff—the *Sonderstab Wilberg*—in the Ministry of War and, also unlike the Italians, Germany's Spanish involvement led to the "eclipse of the (German) foreign ministry."

82 Quartararo, *Roma*, p. 271; and De Felice, *Lo Stato totalitario*, p. 349.

83 For brief summaries of Italo-German developments, see Toscano, "L'asse Roma-Berlino," p. 192; and De Felice, *Lo Stato totalitario*, pp. 337 and 369-372. For Anglo-Italian developments, see Pratt, *East of Malta*, pp. 44-48.

84 The dismissal of the treaty is in Pratt, *East of Malta*, p. 63. The reality of this 'agreement' is that its entire wording consists of one fairly long sentence, see *British and Foreign State Papers*, Vol. 141 (London, 1950), pp. 387-388.

85 *DBFP*, XVIII, No. 54, Sargent to Drummond, 11 January, 1937.

86 The limitations may also have reflected Eden's feeling that the agreement was an "unfortunate concession to the pusillanimity of the three services." (Lowe and Marzari, *Italian Foreign Policy*, p. 294.)

87 Quartararo, *Roma*, pp. 309 and 324; and De Felice, *Lo Stato totalitario*, pp. 356-357.

88 Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (New York, 1977), p. 573; and Pratt, *East of Malta*, p. 64.

89 LP 14/173-197 *passim*, Colloquio del Duce col presidente Goering, 23 January, 1937; or Galeazzo Ciano, *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers* (London, 1948), pp. 80-91. Goering's claim at this meeting that news of the Anglo-Italian accord had been received in Germany with pleasure cannot be taken seriously.

90 R.H. Haig, D.S. Morris and A.R. Peters, *The Years of Triumph? German Diplomatic and Military Policy 1933-1941* (Totowa, N.J., 1986), p. 74.

91 In AVON 7/444, Vansittart to Eden, 22 January, 1937, Vansittart referred to how "the Italians are becoming very difficult," and commented on a recent speech by Mussolini in which he had denigrated the democracies.

92 The fascist technique of negotiation by intimidation is well described by Harold Nicolson, in *Diplomacy* (London, 1939), pp. 152-153. Or stated another way: the dictators had succeeded to date, and were "increasingly confident that, by threats, they could get

more."(Taylor, *English History*, p. 421.)

93 Frank, "Spanish Civil War," p. 374-375.

94 Harvey, *Diaries*, pp. 37 and 39-40.

95 Ibid., p. 34. In a curious contrast to Eden's well-documented battle to maintain a foothold in cabinet for his policies, Quartararo, (*Roma*, p. 328.) reports that in April, 1937, the "anti-Italian front prevailed, so that the London government organized a vast diplomatic offensive, to try to create an anti-Italian and anti-German coalition in the Mediterranean, with the participation of Greece and Portugal." The sources she cites are telegrams from the Italian Foreign Ministry to its embassies; hardly unbiased references.

96 Edwards, *British Government*, p. 102; Carlton, *Eden*, pp. 86-87; and Pratt, *East of Eden*, pp. 43-44.

97 For an excellent review of the Treasury-Foreign Office rivalry over Japanese policy, see Ann Trotter, "Backstage Diplomacy: Britain and Japan in the 1930s," *Journal of Oriental Studies*, 15, 1977, pp. 37-45.

Chapter Two

Chamberlain in Power

Neville Chamberlain came to power on 28 May, 1937, after many years in waiting as Stanley Baldwin's heir-apparent. High hopes were held for his administration. In 1936, a fellow cabinet member anticipated that with him as prime minister, a "good time" would be coming for government members with "liberal and radical" policy ideas. Chamberlain, he knew, had a "mind of his own (and) . . . wanted to get things done."[1] Being cast in the role of a party rejuvenator was not new; Chamberlain had been identified as a possible leader by Lord Balfour as early as 1923.[2] In the ensuing years, Chamberlain loyally supported the prime minister, despite those who urged him to make a bid for power, and waited with increasing impatience for Baldwin finally to bestow leadership on him in 1937.[3] His loyalty reflected both his personal antipathy to dissent and the sympathetic and understanding bond between these two politicians—so similar in background and so different in temperament.[4]

I

Chamberlain's dynamic approach to the job of prime minister was evident from the start, as he immediately set about to improve Anglo-German relations while trying to stabilize the situation in the Far East.[5] This quick action on these issues was consistent with his intention, as expressed to Lady Astor, to be his own foreign secretary on taking power, although Anthony Eden, the incumbent, seemed blissfully unaware of the prime minister's plans.[6] In fact, Eden welcomed the change in leadership and considered that Chamberlain might become one of Britain's great prime ministers. But while he anticipated a more efficient administration and greater cabinet discipline, he also feared that under Chamberlain affairs might "go less smoothly," because he "would not be able to resist scoring off the Opposition."[7] Yet, Eden should have anticipated Chamberlain's foreign policy plans, based on the prime minister's past performance. In the absence of any competition from Baldwin on most matters, Chamberlain had become the "most important decision maker in Cabinet."[8] Even as chancellor of the exchequer, Chamberlain confidently tackled questions of defence policy, and from here it was only a short step to find justification to criticize what he

perceived as Sir John Simon's "pitiable" performance as foreign secretary in 1933.[9] By 1935 he had a "prerogative to speak on foreign policy," and L.W. Fuchser claims that in the following year Chamberlain had brought foreign policy under his control.[10] This latter claim is excessive; Chamberlain's position within the Baldwin government gave him power to guide foreign policy without having any authority in its execution or any responsibility for its consequences; it did not give him power to control it. An example of his very strong guidance occurred on 10 June, 1936, when he spoke against the government's policy of continuing to apply sanctions against Italy. He did this, he claimed, in order to give "the party and country a lead," but on a personal level, it added to his prestige as a 'leader'; which position was further enhanced, to Eden's detriment, when the sanctions were dropped soon after, implying that his intervention had been crucial.[11]

Two interpretations can be placed on Chamberlain's abrupt challenge to Eden's authority as foreign secretary, which was a calculated breach of cabinet solidarity that Chamberlain himself would never have tolerated later as prime minister. Robert Rhodes James presents one of these interpretations in his claim, based on Chamberlain's recollections, that he had not consulted Eden about his speech because, despite the foreign secretary's sympathy for the argument, he would have had to ask Chamberlain not to say it for obvious political reasons.[12] James' argument is defeated by his own evidence. He had noted earlier that on 27 May Eden had stated in his diary that he and Chamberlain still "tenaciously" supported sanctions, despite a majority in cabinet who favoured dropping them. Eden also noted that he believed the controls should be maintained until at least September.[13] This makes it unlikely that Chamberlain had any basis for believing Eden agreed with his revised view that sanctions should be dropped. Chamberlain's subsequent claim that Eden secretly agreed with him was nothing more than an attempt to justify for the record his breach of trust to a cabinet colleague. The other interpretation, and surely the correct one, is that of Carlton who believes that Chamberlain was probing Eden's character. When this direct challenge to the foreign secretary's policies went unanswered, Chamberlain felt certain "that he had the measure of Eden."[14] Thus, Chamberlain could be assured of controlling foreign policy from the prime

minister's office, once he came to power.

Chamberlain's belief, on the basis of that probing, that Eden would prove to be a docile foreign secretary must have been an important factor in Eden retaining that post while most of his colleagues, although remaining in cabinet, received new responsibilities. Some cabinet members had even wanted to see Eden dismissed. In March, 1937, Hoare urged Chamberlain to make his new government "as unlike the old as possible," and not to let anything negative occur in foreign policy until he was in control.[15] Hoare's objective was almost certainly to dump Eden and hopefully regain the Foreign Office for himself, but he did not allow for Chamberlain's confidence in his own ability to deal with foreign affairs and his belief that Eden would follow wherever he led. Hoare's advice was ignored, and Chamberlain retained the membership of Baldwin's cabinet almost intact, merely shuffling duties among the same old team. In many ways, this decision by the prime minister was surprising, considering the premium he ostensibly placed on efficiency. The assumption that he would get rid of the useless and bring in new blood seemed to be a reasonable expectation, but he did not do so.[16] Keith Middlemas' suggestions that he lacked alternative choices, or that he was certain the loyal senior members would always carry the majority are only partial answers, as is the claim that in order to retain the vestiges of a national government he had to keep token national-liberal and national-labour members in cabinet.[17] It is much more likely that he was confident of his ability, as prime minister, to dominate the same cabinet members he had already ruled as chancellor of the exchequer. As a senior conservative, Leo Amery, explained it: Chamberlain built a "one-man cabinet," because he wanted to create a cabinet in which his opinion would prevail.[18] This meant that when Eden brought Foreign Office recommendations forward for approval, Chamberlain's viewpoint would be supreme.

This marked a significant change in the way in which British foreign policy was set. No longer did the traditional system apply in which the prime minister and the foreign secretary shared responsibility for foreign policy with the cabinet serving in a consultative capacity.[19] Instead, Chamberlain controlled the three committees responsible for reviewing Eden's proposals. The first of these, the rather informal cabinet Foreign Policy Committee,

was always a challenge for Eden who had few supporters among its twelve members.[20] This first review could be followed by a discussion in the inner cabinet, where Eden, very much the junior in age and experience, faced a determined prime minister and three other ministers who all had had direct Foreign Office experience.[21] Lastly, the cabinet gave its final approval, but often internal differences and a lack of understanding made it difficult to achieve decisions on an agreed collective policy.[22] In practice, by allowing the cabinet to divide on issues the prime minister was able to gain even greater leverage for his authority. He was the only one who was able to bring order out of discord.

Notwithstanding Chamberlain's own supremacy, the continued existence of internal cabinet differences is understandable. When the prime minister retained the old cabinet, he retained the old antagonisms as well. Much of this feeling was directed against Eden, and the fact that he was permitted to retain the coveted post of foreign secretary could only have exacerbated the ill-will in cabinet. References to bitter personal differences surround him: Eden objected to Hoare's return to cabinet in June, 1936; there was no love lost between Eden and Duff Cooper; Hankey was critical of Eden's vanity; and it was believed that the differences between Eden and Hoare were both political and "highly personal."[23] The most obvious conflict lay between Eden and Hoare, and the depths of Hoare's animosity is clearly shown in some handwritten notes he made in early 1938 criticizing past and present cabinet colleagues. He only needed three lines each to dispose of Simon and Lord Runciman; he took half a page each for Stanley Baldwin and Ramsey MacDonald; but he took four pages to deal with what he perceived as Eden's shortcomings.[24] As a result, Eden not only had difficulty dealing with a multi-layered approval system, but these personal antagonisms with his colleagues made him totally dependent on Chamberlain's support in cabinet. Thus, Chamberlain's control of the cabinet, and ultimately foreign policy, was enhanced by the very bickering that reduced its effectiveness.

The effectiveness of the cabinet was also diminished in another sense, as the prime minister increased his use of civil servant advisors to a degree that D.C. Watt describes as a factor in the "breakdown of both Parliamentary and Cabinet Government in the 1930s."[25]

Chamberlain tended to take civil service advice over that of his ministers and, in doing so, derogated from the power and authority of cabinet.[26] This was a carry-over from Chamberlain's days at the Treasury where the "quality of . . . senior civil servants was better" and the co-ordination with their minister was superior to that of the civil servants and the operations of the Foreign Office.[27] The error Chamberlain made, however, was in failing to recognize that he was not dealing with the civil servants' area of expertise when he called on them for diplomatic advice.[28] Nevertheless, Chamberlain's decision to use civil servants as advisors was consistent with most descriptions of his character. He was a man of "intense shyness . . . who could not even unburden his thoughts and fears to his own colleagues;" who preferred co-operation to dissent; and who was "set in his ways, over-confident in his own abilities, susceptible to flattery, and impatient of opposition."[29] Thus it would be easier for him to deal with compliant civil servants than with his egocentric cabinet colleagues. And from his point of view, there was also a more practical reason for such methods: if he wished to avoid the threat of war, then he could best control the process through the premier's office. Therefore, Chamberlain used personal advisors because it was temperamentally easier for him to do so, but this meant that Eden had to fight for his policies without being able to confront his critics within the prime minister's office. The problem that the prime minister unknowingly faced was that at the very time he decided to use personal diplomacy, he was no longer dealing with the traditional system in which statesmen were still gentlemen and the abnormal could be safely discounted.[30]

On the other hand, Eden had achieved little in his years in the Foreign Office to have earned a strong position in the government.[31] What power he did enjoy was based on his popularity in the country and in the House of Commons, but this uncertain power base could never match that of Chamberlain as prime minister and party leader. As a result, Eden quickly adopted Chamberlain's brisk approach to diplomacy. On 2 June, he advised the cabinet that the government's first priority should be "to get into direct communication with Berlin," and with the prime minister's approval, he invited the German foreign minister, Baron Constantin von Neurath, to London for a "general review of the international

situation."[32]

II

This invitation confirmed that Chamberlain and Eden agreed on at least one aspect of foreign policy: Germany was the more dangerous of Britain's potential enemies in Europe and, therefore, an agreement with her would be of greater value than one with Italy.[33] No approach was made to Mussolini at this time, since an underlying objective was to split the Axis powers and isolate Italy from Germany.[34] But the Anglo-German meeting was not to be. Neurath's acceptance on 6 June—agreed to by Hitler—soon became tentative as the Germans appeared to have second thoughts about going to London.[35] Finally on 21 June, Neurath postponed his visit, citing his inability to leave Berlin while conditions in the Mediterranean remained so volatile, following a reported attack on the German cruiser *Leipzig*.[36]

While nothing had come of this brief flirtation, it had generated a worried, even jealous, response from Germany's other suitor—Italy. The Germans had not bothered to keep the Italians informed of their negotiations with Britain. Only a leak of information had forced Neurath on 13 June to send word to Mussolini regarding Eden's invitation.[37] Although cautious, the Germans had appeared ready to negotiate with Britain, even at the risk of alienating Italy. But once their plans were made public, Ulrich von Hassell, the German ambassador in Rome, was ordered to allay Italian suspicions by stressing that Neurath's contact with London would also promote improved Anglo-Italian relations.[38] In his efforts to placate the Italians, Neurath claimed to b surprised at the invitation which he felt was not quite timely, but which he "could not decline without violating the requirements of courtesy."[39]

The Italians were not so easily persuaded; Mussolini had been misled by the Germans. Almost a week after Neurath had accepted Eden's invitation, the Duce had met with Hassell on 12 June for general discussions. During this meeting, Mussolini "had spoken often vehemently, about relations with England," and had sworn that no unilateral understanding would be reached between Italy and Britain.[40] Yet by this time, the Germans had already received an invitation from Britain, had tentatively accepted it, and were apparently ready to

leave Mussolini isolated. It is no wonder that Galeazzo Ciano, Italy's foreign minister, had found the news of Britain's invitation to be "an unwelcome surprise." But with his usual pre-occupation for appearance over substance, his first concern was that the visit would be seen as a weakening of the Rome-Berlin Axis and he deplored the negative opinions that would be generated.[41] Logic finally dictated that Italy had to make the best of a bad situation—she could not afford to risk her Axis connection—and Ciano agreed that Neurath could express Italy's viewpoint during his London meetings.[42] This diplomatic tiff was of little significance in its own right, except that it provided the incentive the Italians needed to try to outdo the Germans in reaching an accord with the British.

Without reference to the British or Germans, Ciano began an outflanking manoeuvre designed to restore Anglo-Italian friendship. Writing to Count Dino Grandi, the Italian ambassador in London, on 20 June, Ciano advised him that a reconciliation with Britain was "not only possible, but also desirable."[43] Presumably a deal with Britain had become "possible" because of her willingness to open negotiations with Germany, and "desirable" because Italy had been excluded from that first initiative. Even before he knew that Neurath had postponed his visit, Ciano's terms for reconciliation were tough: all outstanding differences must be settled and the Italian Empire must be recognized without equivocation.[44] But the artfulness of Ciano's approach lay in its timing and prime objective. Grandi was not to see Chamberlain until late July, just before he left for Rome on his annual leave. His pending departure would add a sense of urgency to his plan, which was to ask Chamberlain if he wished, as the new head of government, to have him take a message to Rome for the Duce.[45] This was to be an offer that the prime minister could not refuse; he not only would have an eager messenger with access to Mussolini, but the appeal to Chamberlain's vanity would be irresistible. And the real prize for the Italians was that the British prime minister would be seen as a supplicant to Mussolini. When Ciano learned in the last week of June that Neurath's visit had been postponed, his own plans for courting Britain were well in hand.

In order to condition the British government for Grandi's message, a virulent anti-British press campaign was started in Italy in late June. Whereas Britain's Foreign Office

would normally try to establish good relations with a potential ally as a basis for pending negotiations, the Italian Foreign Ministry would prepare the ground by first creating a sense of grievance among the Italian people; this grievance would then be used to annoy or to threaten the other country; and, finally, Italy would demand compensation from the target country in return for abandoning her trumped-up claims.[46] The new press campaign represented the first two phases of this technique and it so rattled the British ambassador in Rome, Sir Eric Drummond, that he feared war with Italy could result from a possible "act of folly."[47] Drummond's fearful reaction was typical of the man and this added an unfortunate complication to the formulation of British policy. Drummond's irresolute personality was well known, as was his assumed sympathy towards fascism. His critics have noted his "indolent and indecisive character;" Gladwyn Jebb, who had served in Rome under him, described Drummond as "almost an apologist for the Duce;" and even Ciano thought of him as a convert who "understood and even loved Fascism."[48] Ciano misread Drummond; he was not a convert to fascism, but he was a weak ambassador in a post where strength of character was essential, and he was thus unable to represent forcefully Britain's interests in Italy, or to assess properly Italy's intentions towards Britain.[49]

The first results of Mussolini's sabre rattling were counter-productive. At a committee meeting on 5 July, Chamberlain identified a "settlement with Germany" as Britain's major diplomatic goal. Two days later, the cabinet rubber stamped this policy as the best way to counter Italian threats.[50] This was consistent with Chamberlain's original desire for better relations with Germany, and at this stage he can be seen as "a man who would have to be persuaded to appease Mussolini."[51] On the face of it, both Chamberlain and Eden seemed to have changed their approach towards Italy from the position Eden took at the Imperial Conference in May. At that time and apparently with Chamberlain's full approval, Eden declared that Britain was prepared to negotiate with Italy provided that certain conditions were met.[52] Yet by July, Eden was far from ready to negotiate with Italy; he did not show the same flexibility towards her as he did towards Germany. Hence his suggestion that Britain should consider a show of strength in the Mediterranean follows from his hard line approach,

and Chamberlain's agreement to consider this proposal indicates the prime minister's apparent indifference to Mussolini's bluster.[53] But this assessment would be wrong. For even as he was discounting the possibility of coming to terms with Italy, the prime minister had authorized a secret approach to Ciano through unofficial third parties. Grandi reported to Ciano on 12 July that Sir Joseph Ball, director of the Conservative Party's Research Office and a close friend of Chamberlain, had asked an employee at the Italian embassy to go to Rome on an unofficial basis to find out what terms the Italians would require to re-establish cordial relations before the prime minister took any official steps.[54] Ball reported that Chamberlain was "absolutely determined to find the way to a reconciliation with Italy," but first he wanted to find common ground "outside of official Foreign Office contacts."[55]

Dino Grandi was alive to the possibilities that this secret approach gave him to influence British foreign policy.[56] He believed that this development would help to consolidate his position with the Conservative Party's directors and promote his efforts to "catechize" those near Chamberlain.[57] His objective was "to drive a wedge into the developing split between Eden and Chamberlain" (presumably indicated by Chamberlain's willingness to outflank the Foreign Office), and "to enlarge it more if possible." Barely six weeks after the formation of the new government, Grandi claimed that he could see the "uneasiness surrounding Eden and Vansittart", which he described as a "malaise" caused by Chamberlain's clear intention to take control of British foreign policy.[58] Grandi correctly believed that Chamberlain's first priority was a German agreement, but he also assumed that the prime minister hoped to reach agreements with both Axis powers. The ambassador also looked on his coming meeting with Chamberlain as another opportunity to "overcome Eden's position and also Vansittart's mentality" which in his judgement saw an agreement with Italy primarily as a means of encircling Germany.[59]

At the same time, Chamberlain's willingness to seek an accommodation with Italy was encouraged by the service chiefs and their principal spokesman, Sir Maurice Hankey. He argued that Britain's "foreign policy and defences have got out of step;" the Foreign Office was still operating as if Britain had the military capability to match her potential enemies, all

of whom were better armed.[60] He also urged that Britain should take steps to buy time in order to build up her forces to replace the discredited system of collective security, in which strategy Italy was a critical factor, since otherwise Britain could only defend her Mediterranean interests by weakening her home defences. In accepting the Italians' claim that they were only in Spain to defeat communism, he noted that in Britain "many people would like to see Franco win for the same reason."[61]

In contrast to the common viewpoint held by Hankey and the service chiefs, there was a variety of views on an Italian policy within the Foreign Office. The range of opinions is illustrated by the comments added to a message dated 20 July from Sir Miles Lampson, the British ambassador in Cairo, who warned of Italian aggression in the eastern Mediterranean.[62] P.B.B. Nichols, recently transferred from Rome and conscious of Italian sensibilities, wrote that Italian aggression was based on their fear of Britain and that Mussolini had to be convinced he was wrong.[63] In his note, Sir Orme Sargent, an assistant under-secretary, deplored Lampson's "Italophobia;" he thought that an Italian understanding was possible. Vansittart agreed with this, but cautioned that Italy's rearmament was driven by her "very strong and notorious expansionist tendencies." In the final comment on this document, Eden concurred with Vansittart's views and suggested that if Mussolini were planning an act of aggression, his present procedure was the right one to follow. He acknowledged that his suspicions might be unfounded, but "while reciprocating any advances we should be watchful in the extreme."[64] These comments indicate that while there was general support for some accommodation with Italy within the Foreign Office, the requirements as to pre-conditions varied widely. The junior officers, to the extent that Nichols is a good example, were prepared to accept Italian guarantees at face value; the under-secretaries, such as Sargent and Sir George Mounsey, were cautiously prepared to accept Italian promises in order to get talks started; and even Vansittart would have forgiven much to be able to turn Mussolini against Hitler.[65] Only Eden was unwilling, given his past experience, to begin negotiations with the Italians without prior proof of good faith. Therefore, Eden's more business-like approach to Italy—which called for the equivalent of a performance bond or a surety

guarantee—increasingly isolated him from the prime minister and from many of his officials in the Foreign Office.

III

Despite his reservations towards Italy, it was Eden who first suggested the idea of writing a personal letter to Mussolini; a task he advised Chamberlain he would undertake and would attempt a draft as soon as he had a chance.[66] The following day, Sir Orme Sargent, obviously at Eden's direction, prepared a summary of the points to be considered before writing to the Duce.[67] Every potential advantage had an offsetting disadvantage: a letter would give Drummond a pretext to meet with Mussolini, but Britain would be seen to be running after Italy; logically the prime minister should sign the letter, but this could be seen as a rebuff to Eden; and generalities should be avoided in favour of concrete proposals, but no mention could be made of Abyssinia.[68] Sargent's final recommendation that a letter should be delayed may have deflected Eden's intention to prepare a draft for the prime minister's consideration. The under-secretary had argued that the significance of the letter could change, depending on the outcome of discussions then underway in the Non-Intervention Committee regarding an offer from the democracies to grant Franco belligerent rights in return for the withdrawal of the Italian and German volunteers.[69] The idea of a letter to Mussolini was also raised by Grandi during a meeting with Eden on 21 July.[70] Grandi first expressed his desire to meet with the prime minister before the end of the month in order to deliver personally a message of friendship from Mussolini in the more propitious atmosphere created by Eden's conciliatory speech in the House of Commons two days earlier.[71] In fact, Grandi's timing had been previously set by Ciano's instructions on 20 June; it was not affected one way or another by the "more propitious atmosphere."[72] However, in their meeting, Grandi gave Eden the gist of the Duce's message for Chamberlain, possibly to reduce the need for Eden to attend his meeting with the prime minister, and he mentioned that a letter from Chamberlain would be of great assistance to him. Eden obviously did not advise Grandi that he (Eden) had already considered sending a letter to Mussolini, nor did he give any particular emphasis to Grandi's suggestion in his summary of their meeting.[73]

However, the idea of a letter from Chamberlain to Mussolini was quickly adopted by Sir Horace Wilson, the prime minister's personal advisor. On 26 July, Wilson rejected the brief prepared by Vansittart to guide the prime minister in his meeting with Grandi. He did not believe that Vansittart's emphasis on Italy's military preparations, especially in Libya, or Eden's warning not to let Grandi "get away with the idea that we are to blame for the present tension . . . in the Mediterranean," provided the proper basis for a "genial discussion."[74] Instead, Wilson suggested that the prime minister should write a friendly personal letter to the Duce in which he could refer to his past involvement with Italy and to Austen Chamberlain's personal friendship with Mussolini. He strongly recommended that Chamberlain emphasize the long-standing Anglo-Italian friendship and the fact that Britain wished to return to that relationship. Moreover, he should express a willingness on Britain's part to discuss any problems that Italy thought stood in the way of a new understanding.[75] As a result, Chamberlain entered the meeting on 27 July with conflicting advice: the soft approach urged by Wilson and the business-like approach favoured by the Foreign Office. Grandi, on the other hand, had his own agenda: that received from Ciano on 20 June.

The meeting was a mis-match from the start. For the first time Chamberlain was exposed to the difference between theoretical and practical diplomacy. His past experience could not match that of Grandi, an "astute politician" who "moved easily in influential English circles."[76] Indeed, Grandi's very presence in London as Italian ambassador indicated an instinct for survival in the brutal arena of fascist politics beyond the prime minister's comprehension. Nor for all of Chamberlain's experience in political infighting and the cut and thrust of parliamentary debate could he match Grandi's "Mephistophelean"[77] mind. The ambassador's opening gambit was a measure of his guile. He quoted from a four-page letter from Mussolini with so many personal interpolations that Chamberlain had difficulty "in distinguishing which was Grandi and which was Mussolini."[78] This was a perceptive comment, because there was no letter from Mussolini—despite suggestions to the contrary—only Ciano's letter of 20 June, which Grandi paraphrased perfectly for his presentation to Chamberlain.[79] Grandi had realized that the subterfuge of a "letter" would bestow a credibility and

significance on his message that it would have lacked had he merely been passing on Ciano's comments. Grandi himself acknowledged that in truth "the Duce would never have trusted me with a message of this nature."[80] But the points he made to Chamberlain were consistent with Mussolini's stated aims and those in Ciano's June letter regarding Spain and *de jure* recognition of the Italian Empire.[81] Chamberlain's response gave Britain's position clearly with respect to *de jure* recognition and he raised the question of Italy's garrison in Libya, but curiously made no reference to the Italian presence in Spain—the major stumbling block Britain faced in the restoration of improved relations with Italy.[82] He also ignored Eden's specific advice not to accept any blame for the current tension when he claimed to understand Italian abuse on the basis that one thing led to another.[83] Finally, Chamberlain took the initiative and asked if it "would be acceptable" to write a letter to Mussolini, and on receiving Grandi's assurances that such a letter would be warmly appreciated, the prime minister wrote a brief note for Grandi to take with him.[84] This was a deliberate move that Chamberlain had previously decided to take, and it was totally in keeping with his announced intention to be his own foreign secretary.[85] By sending his letter to Mussolini, even though he was aware that Eden would likely have objected to such a move, the prime minister was able to place his personal stamp of authority on British foreign policy.[86] In a belated recognition of the Foreign Office's role, Chamberlain hoped that they would "play up," since he believed they were "inclined to be jealous."[87]

The secret approach to Ciano, Eden's new conciliatory tone towards Italy (which surely reflected the prime minister's wishes) and his letter to Mussolini all indicate a new determination on Chamberlain's part to come to terms with the Italians. Nevertheless, his record of his meeting with Grandi, including his references to *de jure* recognition, Libyan reinforcements and Italian press attacks, indicates that he took a stronger line with the Italians than Wilson had recommended.[88] Therefore, Carlton's suggestion that Chamberlain followed "Wilson's rather than the Foreign Office's line" is at best only partially correct.[89] In addition, Pratt notes that the prime minister did not make the first approach to the Italians, nor did he first suggest that a letter be written to Mussolini.[90] Yet Chamberlain's approach to the Italian

embassy in mid-July preceded any official Italian move, and while he did not first suggest writing directly to Mussolini, his manner of doing so suggests an unseemly eagerness on the prime minister's part to impress the Italians. But the letter was not the "grave diplomatic error" that Aster suggests it was; and even its greatest potential critic, Eden, would only have made a few changes to protect Chamberlain from seeming too gullible.[91] On his part, Grandi urged Mussolini to reply in the same friendly spirit in order to match the prime minister's conciliatory tone.[92] Although the Duce did not appreciate advice from his ambassadors, his reply on 31 July was exactly what Grandi had ordered.[93] The letter reached Grandi in London on 2 August, the Monday of the bank holiday long weekend, and the ambassador was fortunate to present it to Chamberlain before the prime minister left for Scotland that evening.[94]

Once again, circumstances combined to have the prime minister and Grandi meet without anyone present from the Foreign Office. This was unfortunate, because Chamberlain's and Grandi's versions of their meeting on 2 August cannot be compared without reaching the conclusion that the prime minister had excluded portions of the discussion from his minutes. In fairness to him, an argument can be made that, even if Grandi's account is correct, the items Chamberlain left out were not substantive. But this would not be a complete defence. The missing material is important; it would have revealed the prime minister's plans with regard to foreign policy problems and to Britain's relations with Italy. In summary, Chamberlain's record of the meeting referred to a series of actions proposed by the Italians to reduce tensions between the countries, and it confirmed Grandi's suggestion that talks should begin in Rome in August. In addition, the prime minister noted Grandi's concern that if the League of Nations did not soon free their member nations to recognize Italy's conquest of Abyssinia, "he was afraid nothing could be done for another year." Finally, Chamberlain noted that he had warned Grandi against using the talks as a means of trying to split Britain and France. The ambassador promised to pass this comment on to Mussolini while reiterating the serious antagonisms that existed between Italy and France's popular front government.[95]

Grandi's much longer record of this meeting agreed with Chamberlain's report on those topics mentioned by the prime minister.[96] However, the ambassador included other matters and comments that are not part of the prime minister's report. As an example, he reported that Chamberlain had asked him to advise the Duce that while Britain was a friend of the French nation, she did not necessarily support France's popular front government.[97] Grandi reported that he had criticized Britain's ineffectual performance at the League of Nations (not mentioned by the prime minister and almost certainly exaggerated by Grandi), and that Chamberlain had acknowledged the "necessity to resolve, without further delays, the problem of recognizing Italian sovereignty in Abyssinia." According to Grandi, Chamberlain had also declared that he planned to continue "to intervene directly in the handling of international problems," although he wanted Eden to "maintain his authority and responsibility." Finally, Chamberlain is reported to have suggested that not only was the Rome-Berlin Axis not in conflict with a new Rome-London accord, but the Axis could make a decisive contribution towards a European agreement.[98]

These references from Grandi's record of the meeting give the distinct impression that Chamberlain was more willing to share his thoughts and plans with the Italian ambassador than with his own colleagues, and especially with his own foreign secretary. On the other hand, the possibility cannot be ignored that Grandi had embellished his account for home consumption, and Chamberlain was not as ingratiating as he was depicted. Malcolm Muggeridge deals with this issue in his introduction to *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*. He warns that "totalitarian reporting . . . tends to be obsequious," and that in the case of Grandi's dispatches from London, Chamberlain's complaisance would be stressed.[99] Yet on balance, after considering Chamberlain's secretiveness with his own colleagues and his obvious desire to impress the Italians, and setting this against Grandi's often inspired opportunism and his wish to impress the Duce, the Grandi summary still seems basically reliable. In fact, Grandi's description of Chamberlain's references to the French and of his plans for foreign affairs, seem to match Chamberlain's personal thoughts on these subjects. Where Grandi and Chamberlain referred to the same topic, their reports agreed; which also lends credence to

Grandi's report on the material omitted by Chamberlain. This then raises questions about Chamberlain's judgement. That the prime minister would give the representative of a potential enemy (the cabinet had ruled on 14 July that Italy could no longer be considered a "reliable friend") such a broad insight into his future plans suggests that he was carried away by his own sense of power and his belief in his personal ability to influence and even control events.[100] This was a dangerous precedent; Britain's parliamentary system lacked the checks and balances to deal with a prime minister who affected a presidential style of government.

IV

From a positive standpoint, however, within two months of his coming to power Chamberlain's foreign policy initiatives had borne fruit. Although rebuffed by Germany, that attempt had opened the way to negotiations with the Italians. They were a good second choice: Italy had great strategic significance because of Britain's critical Mediterranean and Far East interests, and she might still serve as a counterweight to German ambitions in central Europe. These were long-standing British considerations and the renewed interest in Italian negotiations was "not a departure but a continuation in British foreign policy in the post-Abyssinian period."[101] Consequently, at the end of his meeting with Grandi on 2 August, Chamberlain had every reason to believe that Britain was on the threshold of a new relationship with Italy which, in turn, would surely lead to new opportunities with Germany, and then to a general accord to ensure peace in Europe. In reality, Chamberlain's hopes were stillborn. On the following day, 3 August, the Spanish Nationalist leader, Francisco Franco, asked Mussolini for naval assistance to stop Soviet shipments of war material from reaching Spanish Republican ports, and Chamberlain's plans began to unravel.

Notes

1 W. P. Crozier, *Off the Record: Political Interviews 1933-1943* (London, 1973), p. 64. This interview with Leslie Hore-Belisha on 15 July, 1936, gives a typical reaction, even though G.C. Peden describes Hore-Belisha as "very much a Chamberlain man." (G. C. Peden, *British Rearmament and the Treasury: 1932-1939* (Edinburgh, 1979), p. 18.)

2 David Dilks, *Neville Chamberlain*, Vol. I, *Pioneering and Reform 1869-1929* (London, 1984), p. 360.

3 See Dilks, *Chamberlain*, pp. 558-559; and H. Montgomery-Hyde, *Neville Chamberlain* (London, 1976), p. 54, for instances of leadership support which he declined.

4 George Mallaby, *Each in His Office: Studies of Men in Power* (London, 1972), p. 140; and Derek Walker-Smith, *Neville Chamberlain* (London, 1940), p. 201.

5 Pratt, *East of Malta*, p. 79. Chamberlain's comment in Keith Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain* (London, 1946), p. 329, that "If only we could get on terms with the Germans, I would not care a rap for Musso," says it all. And his expectations were not unfounded; the Germans were "laying great hopes on the . . . Cabinet changes in England." (*DBFP*, XVIII, No. 302, Phipps to Strang, 16 March,1937.)

6 Montgomery-Hyde, *Chamberlain*, p. 3.

7 Carlton, *Eden*, p. 100; and Harvey, *Diaries*, p. 21.

8 Robert Paul Shay, Jr., *British Rearmament in the Thirties: Politics and Profits* (Princeton, 1977), p. 15.

9 Peden, *British Rearmament*, p. 17; and Middlemas, *Diplomacy*, p. 50.

10 Middlemas, *Diplomacy*, p. 51; and Larry William Fuchser, *Neville Chamberlain and Appeasement* (New York, 1982), p. 30.

11 Cowling, *Impact of Hitler*, pp. 140-141.

12 Robert Rhodes James, *Anthony Eden* (New York, 1986), p. 167. James also argues that Eden had reluctantly come to the same view as Chamberlain, but his claim is based solely on the fact that Eden supported the recommendation to drop sanctions during the subsequent Commons debate. It does not confirm what Eden's opinion was on 10 June.

13 Ibid., p. 166.

14 Carlton *Eden*, p. 85. This quotation is attributed to Lord Swinton, then secretary of state for air.

15 Edwards, *British Government*, p. 89.

16 Crozier, *Off the Record*, p. 63.

17 Middlemas, *Diplomacy*, p. 65-66. A very basic component—age—split Chamberlain's cabinet to a remarkable degree. The senior 'conservative' half of the cabinet represented the pre-war years, while the First World War and the post-war period had been the formative years for Eden and the other younger members, derisively dubbed the 'Boys Brigade' by Chamberlain.

18 Cowling, *Impact of Hitler*, p. 225.

19 Middlemas, *Diplomacy*, p. 61.

20 Ian Colvin, *The Chamberlain Cabinet* (London, 1971), pp. 20 and 36. Colvin argues that it was in this committee, formed in 1936 after the Rhineland crisis, that appeasement was secretly pushed. This group had no influence on the Nyon issues as it did not meet between July, 1937 and January, 1938.

21 Edwards, *British Government*, p. 11. Inner cabinet members were Chamberlain, Lord Halifax, Sir John Simon, Sir Samuel Hoare and Eden. Two of these ministers, Simon and Hoare, had been forced out of their posts as foreign secretary while their junior, Eden, not only survived relatively unscathed, but eventually became foreign secretary himself. Their attitude towards Eden was understandably critical. Lord Halifax was also experienced in Whitehall, and while more friendly to Eden, in 1937 his loyalty to Chamberlain was absolute.

22 Ibid.

23 Aster, *Eden*, p. 45; Charmley, *Duff Cooper*, p. 107; Roskill, *Hankey*, p. 265; and Edwards, *British Government*, pp. 88-89.

24 T'WOOD X:5, Comments by Sir Samuel Hoare on cabinet colleagues, Undated, but context points to February, 1938.

25 D.C. Watt, "Appeasement: The Rise of a Revisionist School?", *The Political Quarterly*, 36, 2, 1965, p. 210.

26 Ibid.

27 Trotter, "Backstage Diplomacy," p. 38. This comparison may be accurate, but it is also unfair. It was easier for Treasury officials to operate in their structured world than in what Owen O'Malley, *The Phantom Caravan* (London, 1954), p. 159, describes as the sometimes "lunatic asylum" atmosphere in the Foreign Office. It is really an apples and oranges comparison: that of the specialist requirements in the Treasury being contrasted with the generalist abilities needed in diplomacy.

28 Lord Strang, *Home and Abroad* (London, 1956), p. 124. Strang, who had served in the Foreign Office in the 1930s, tried to put the question into perspective with reference to Chamberlain's principal advisor, Sir Horace Wilson. He noted that as a civil servant, Wilson had to give advice when asked, but Strang believed that Wilson should have advised the prime minister that foreign policy was outside of his area of competence. Strang overlooked the fact that human nature does not work that way in general, and certainly not among civil servants.

29 Colvin, *Cabinet*, p. 46; Mallaby, *Each in His Office*, p. 140; and Rose, "Resignation," pp. 914-915.

30 John H. Herz, "The Relevancy and Irrelevancy of Appeasement," *Social Research*, 31, 3, 1964, pp. 302-303.

31 Cowling, *Impact of Hitler*, p. 164, notes Eden's lack of achievement; and Roskill, *Hankey*, p. 241, thinks that Eden should have resigned in 1936 when his policy of sanctions against Italy collapsed.

32 Pratt, *East of Malta*, p. 73; and *DBFP*, XVIII, No. 561, Eden to Henderson, 2 June, 1937.

33 Rose, "Resignation," p. 913; and Feiling, *Chamberlain*, p. 329.

34 Pratt, *East of Malta*, p. 73.

35 For the German acceptance, see *DBFP*, XVIII, No. 582, Henderson to Eden, 6 June, 1937.

36 The Mediterranean problems are referred to in *DGFP*, III, No. 287, Neurath to State Secretary, 9 June, 1937; and *DGFP*, III, No. 307, Neurath to State Secretary, 13 June, 1937. For Germany's postponement of the visit, see *DGFP*, III, No. 346, State Secretary to various embassies, 21 June, 1937. The reason for the German decision is not clear, but it was certainly not because Hitler failed to give his approval, or as the result of an earlier attack on the pocket battleship *Deutschland*. (See Middlemas, *Diplomacy*, p.115; and Edwards, *British Government*, p.58.) The *Leipzig* incident (probably a fabrication itself) was the most likely cause, although conflict between Neurath and Joachim von Ribbentrop, the German ambassador in London, may have played some small part.(See Pratt, *East of Malta*, p. 74; and Middlemas, *Diplomacy*, p. 115.) The best summary of this Anglo-German exchange is found in Weinberg, *1937-1939*, pp. 99-102. A later suggestion that "Italian influence had done much to prevent the Neurath visit" (*DBFP*, XIX, No. 107, Henderson to Eden, 29 August, 1937.) is a weak excuse, not a reason.

37 *DGFP*, III, No. 309, Mackensen to Hassell, 13 June, 1937.

38 Ibid.

39 *DGFP*, III, No. 319, Neurath to Hassell, 14 June, 1937. Wienberg, *1937-1939*, p. 100, notes that Neurath "owed" a return visit to London after Simon's trip to Berlin in 1935.

40 *DGFP*, III, No. 306, Hassell to Foreign Ministry, 12 June, 1937. It is interesting that in this meeting Hassell tried to convince Mussolini that Britain did not have "any spirit of revenge" against Italy, when he could much more easily have stirred up Mussolini's anti-British feelings. This suggests that Hassell was hopeful of a diplomatic settlement with Britain and was trying to get Mussolini in the proper frame of mind to accept such a possiblity.

41 *DGFP*, III, No. 320, Hassell to Foreign Ministry, 14 June, 1937. Ciano's description of this meeting indicates that he saw Neurath's visit to London and the presence of Field Marshal Werner von Blomberg, the German war minister, at the coronation in London (which the Italians boycotted) as signs that Germany was softening her attitude towards Britain. In addition, he bitterly noted Hassell's barely concealed "pleasure at the forthcoming political activity of his Minister."(Ciano, *Diplomatic Papers*, pp. 122-123.)

42 *DGFP*, III, No. 329, Hassell to Foreign Ministry, 16 June, 1937.

43 LP 19/1-3, Ciano to Grandi, 20 June, 1937.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 The Italian technique is described by Nicolson, *Diplomacy*, pp. 152-153.

47 PRO: PREM 1/276, pp. 381-383, Drummond to Vansittart, 2 July, 1937. The Italians were almost certainly able to gauge the success of their campaign by reading Drummond's correspondence as provided by the *Servizio Informazioni Militari*. For a review of Italian intelligence successes against the British, see David Dilks, "Flashes of Intelligence," *The Missing Dimension* (London, 1984), pp. 101-125. The scope of Italian operations is indicated by Coverdale's estimate that in one year their intelligence organizations stole 16,000 documents from embassies in Rome. (Coverdale, *Italian Intervention*, p. 111 fn.)

48 Norman Rose, *Vansittart: Study of a Diplomat* (London, 1978), p. 69; Gladwyn Jebb, *The Memoirs of Lord Gladwyn* (London, 1972), p. 49; and Felix Gilbert, "Two British Ambassadors: Perth and Henderson," *The Diplomats, 1919-1939*, Vol. II, (New York, 1953/1974), p. 545. For what is, perhaps, an overly sympathetic assessment of Drummond's work in Rome, see Avon, *Memoirs*, p. 256.

49 The Foreign Office was doubly cursed with an even more supine ambassador, Sir Nevile Henderson, in Berlin.

50 Pratt, *East of Malta*, p. 79; and A.R. Peters, *Anthony Eden at the Foreign Office 1931-1938* (New York, 1986), p. 278.

51 Pratt, *East of Malta*, p. 79.

52 Carlton, *Eden*, p. 105.

53 PRO: FO 371/21160, pp. 28-30, Extract from Cabinet Conclusions (30) 37, 14 July, 1937.

54 The Grandi letter is in De Felice, *Lo Stato totalitario*, pp. 907-910, and is referred to in Quartararo, *Roma*, pp. 341-342. Ball was admirably suited for this task. In addition to his official role as head of the Conservative's Research Department, he had connections with the Secret Service and ran an intelligence service outside the party which had successfully penetrated the Labour Party's inner circles in order to obtain confidential information on Labour's plans and policies—a 1930s version of Watergate. (See Keith Middlemas and John Barnes, *Baldwin: A Biography* (London, 1969), p. 362 fn.; and H. Montgomery-Hyde, *Baldwin: The Unexpected Prime Minister* (London, 1973), p. 321 fn.) Ball's contacts with the Italians were not limited to this one instance; they continued until at least August, 1939. (See De Felice, *Lo Stato totalitario*, p. 659.) In contrast with Chamberlain's secrecy, Eden had made an open approach to the King of Italy through a former British ambassador, but found that the price of an Italian agreement would have been prohibitive. (See Peters, *Eden*, p. 285.)

55 De Felice, *Lo Stato totalitario*, pp. 907-910. A casual reference to these contacts was made to the Foreign Office who apparently did not recognize their significance. For a naive assessment of the contacts, see Viscount Templewood, *Nine Troubled Years* (London, 1954), p. 278; and for a defence of Chamberlain, based on incomplete records, see Iain Macleod, *Neville Chamberlain* (London, 1961), pp. 218-219.

56 This was by no means Grandi's first opportunity to affect adversely British foreign policy. In late October, 1936, Ciano delivered to Hitler thirty-two British Foreign Office documents that contained harsh and contemptuous comments about Germany and the Fuhrer. These had been obtained by Grandi "through his personal contacts" in London. (See De Felice, *Lo Stato totalitario*, p. 353.)

57 De Felice, *Lo Stato totalitario*, p. 908. While Grandi would have exaggerated his undoubted ability to influence the politicians, it is ironical that Mussolini intended to recall him from London in June, 1936, because he was jealous of Grandi's popularity in Britain. (See De Felice, *Lo Stato totalitario*, pp. 340-341.)

58 Ibid., p. 909. Grandi's cynical comments about how he proposed to subvert the influence of the Foreign Office make an interesting contrast to Vansittart's private comments about Grandi, whom he considered to be "completely sincere" with "no sort of malice aforethought." (See PRO: PREM 1/267, pp. 289-291, Vansittart to Chamberlain, 5 August,

1937.) On the other hand, Gladwyn Jebb may have been correct when he wrote that he found Vansittart to be "in a curious way rather simple. It was not, I think, very difficult to take him in." (See Jebb, *Memoirs*, p. 59.)

59 Ibid., pp. 909-910.

60 PRO: PREM 1/276, pp. 360-367, Hankey to Chamberlain, 19 July, 1937.

61 Ibid.

62 PRO: FO 371/21160, pp. 78-80, Lampson to Foreign Office, 20 July, 1937. Documents arriving at the Foreign Office were circulated within the appropriate department from the most junior member up to the foreign secretary, with each person making his recommendation for consideration. Jebb extolled the system for its "intellectual liveliness and complete liberty . . . to say what you thought;" while O'Malley noted that in such a system it was possible for persons with identical backgrounds to recommend "totally dissimilar courses" of action. (See Jebb, *Memoirs*, p. 57; and O'Malley, *Phantom Caravan*, pp. 158-159.) By contrast, all incoming documents in the Foreign Ministry in Rome were controlled in Ciano's office and only distributed from there on a very restricted need-to-know basis.

63 Ibid. On the same day in another dispatch, Vansittart responded to the identical argument from Nichols with the rebuttal that it was "plain, unadulterated rubbish, and nobody knows it better that the Italians." (See PRO: FO 371/21160, p. 102, Hore-Belisha memorandum, 22 July, 1937.)

64 Ibid.

65 Jebb, *Memoirs*, p. 59.

66 PRO: PREM 1/ 276, pp. 368-369, Eden to Chamberlain, 16 July, 1937. Eden adopted the idea of a letter to Mussolini from a suggestion by Lord Halifax.

67 *DBFP*, XIX, No. 45, Minute by Sargent, 17 July, 1937.

68 Ibid.

69 Ibid. See Avon, *Memoirs*, pp, 503-504, regarding the non-intervention debate.

70 *DBFP*, XIX, No. 56, Eden to Drummond, 21 July, 1937.

71 Leading off a foreign policy debate, Eden first defended non-intervention as the only way to avoid a European war over Spain. Then he stated that while Britain would defend her position in the Mediterranean, she was not challenging others and, above all, she was not

seeking revenge—"The word 'vendetta' has no English equivalent." (See H. C. Deb., Fifth Series, Vol. 326, Col. 1803-1805.) Quartararo, *Roma*, p. 342, ascribes Eden's conciliatory tone to Chamberlain's influence.

72 This point is not understood by Carlton, *Eden*, p. 107, among others, who accepts Grandi's explanation for wishing to meet with Chamberlain at its face value.

73 *DBFP*, XIX, No. 56, Eden to Drummond, 21 July, 1937.

74 AVON 13/94-95, Eden to Chamberlain, 24 July, 1937; and PRO: PREM 1/276, pp. 346-347, Wilson to Chamberlain, 26 July, 1937.

75 PRO: PREM 1/276, 346-347, Wilson to Chamberlain, 26 July, 1937.

76 Pratt, *East of Eden*, p. 82.

77 De Felice, *Lo Stato totalitario*, p. 425.

78 PRO: PREM 1/276, pp. 341-345, Chamberlain memorandum, 27 July, 1937. (*DBFP*, XIX, No. 64.)

79 Some descriptions of this meeting assume that Grandi had an actual letter from the Duce. For example, Quartararo refers to a letter from Mussolini; and James goes even farther, he cites "a long letter from Mussolini, of which he (Grandi) did not leave a copy, and which was somewhat garbled by his own interventions."(See Quartararo, *Roma*, p. 344; and James, *Eden*, p. 178.)

80 De Felice, *Lo Stato totalitario*, p. 425. See also p. 344 on Mussolini's general distrust of his ambassadors.

81 PRO: PREM 1/276, pp. 341-345, Chamberlain memorandum, 27 July, 1937.

82 Ibid. Chamberlain's memorandum of approximately six hundred words seems extremely short to cover adequately all matters discussed in this hour-and-a-half meeting.

83 AVON 13/94-95, Eden to Chamberlain, 24 July, 1937, and PRO: PREM 1/276, pp. 341-345, Chamberlain memorandum, 27 July, 1937.

84 PRO: PREM 1/276, pp. 341-35, Chamberlain memorandum, 27 July, 1937.

85 See Carlton, *Eden*, p. 108, for Chamberlain's comments to his sister about his meeting with Grandi and the fact that while he had previously decided to write to the Duce, he had wanted

to give Grandi the impression that he had written the letter without consulting anyone else.

86 See Feiling, *Chamberlain*, p. 330, for Chamberlain's admission that Eden had been deliberately excluded.

87 Carlton, *Eden*, p. 108.

88 PRO: PREM 1/276, pp. 341-345, Chamberlain memorandum, 27 July, 1937. See also, PRO: PREM 1/276, pp. 346-347, Wilson to Chamberlain, 26 July, 1937; and PRO: PREM 1/276, pp. 339-340, Chamberlain to Mussolini, 27 July, 1937. (*DBFP*, XIX, No. 65.)

89 Carlton, *Eden*, p. 108.

90 Pratt, *East of Malta*, pp. 83-84.

91 Aster, *Eden*, p. 46; and Avon, *Memoirs*, p. 510.

92 ASME, SAP, US 227, Grandi to Ciano, 27 July, 1937.

93 PRO: PREM 1/267, pp. 329-330, Mussolini to Chamberlain, 31 July, 1937.

94 ASME, SRD, Londra, 1937, 963/3, Grandi colloquio con Chamberlain, 2 August, 1937. Grandi had sent Chamberlain's letter to Rome and was still in London to receive the reply. On receipt of Grandi's request for a meeting, the prime minister's staff made a token effort to find someone at the Foreign Office to attend the meeting they had arranged for the prime minister and Grandi (Eden was on holidays), but only the resident clerk was there, and they made no attempt to call any of the under-secretaries at their homes. They did, however, reach Wilson at home and he saw no harm if Chamberlain met with Grandi alone as it would be a shame not to continue the "good work," and he also saw no harm if the press learned of the meeting. (See PRO: PREM 1/267, p. 325, E.M.W. memorandum, 2 August, 1937.)

95 *DBFP*, XIX, No. 80, Chamberlain memorandum, 2 August, 1937.

96 ASME, SRD, Londra, 1937, 963/3, Grandi colloquio con Chamberlain, 2 August, 1937.

97 In general, French governments were not popular in Britain. With some notable exceptions, such as Eden and Duff Cooper, the cabinet were essentially anti-French. Even though Chamberlain was not openly contemptuous of French politicians, as was Halifax, he "tended to emphasize the instability and corruptness of French politics." (See Middlemas, *Diplomacy*, p. 55.) Duroselle, *La Décadence*, p. 201, also discusses the anti-French bias that existed at all levels of the British government in the 1930s.

98 ASME, SRD, Londra, 1937, 963/3, Grandi colloquio con Chamberlain, 2 August, 1937.

The portion of Grandi's minute referring to Chamberlain's intentions towards Eden were underlined in the original.

99 Ciano, *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, pp. xxi-xxii.

100 Rose, "Resignation", p. 914, comments on Chamberlain's consciousness of his new power and cites his 8 August letter to a sister in which he claimed, "I have only to raise my finger and the whole of Europe is changed." Following the 2 August meeting, the prime minister's staff advised the Foreign Office that *all* (their emphasis) press inquiries were to be referred to them "in order to avoid any confusion." (See PRO: PREM 1/267, pp. 317-318, Syers memorandum, 2 August, 1937.) This meant that a major foreign policy development was to be interpreted by the civil servants in the premier's office. This was typical of the press control exercised by Chamberlain and described in James Margach, *The Abuse of Power* (London, 1978), pp. 50-63.

101 Pratt, *East of Malta*, p. 84.

Chapter Three

The Submarine Campaign

It is impossible to exaggerate the contrast between the levels of diplomatic activity in London and in Rome in early August, 1937. In London, the government had gone on vacation: parliament was recessed; the prime minister was in Scotland; the foreign secretary had gone to ground in the country; most other cabinet ministers had forsaken their departments; and even Lord Chatfield, the first sea lord, had abandoned his post. Speaking for most of his colleagues, Chatfield had complained that "one always feels one's worst at the beginning of August in London," and the exodus of politicians, civil servants and diplomats from the capital substantiated his view.[1] Moreover, in the wake of the Chamberlain-Mussolini exchange of letters, Chatfield's confidence was such that the Admiralty had been warned not to bother him while he was away; he was sure that "for the next two months things are likely to be quiet."[2]

In contrast, there was a frenzy of activity in Rome. Benito Mussolini, the Italian Duce, had become a focus of international diplomatic attention: he was being wooed simultaneously by Japan, Britain and Spain. Japanese diplomats were in Rome to discuss a neutrality agreement; Britain was preparing to open talks in Rome to restore Anglo-Italian friendship; and Francisco Franco, the Spanish Nationalist leader, was invoking Mussolini's assistance to stop shipments of Soviet war materials from reaching Republican ports.[3]

I

By far the most critical of these initiatives was Franco's. He sought "urgent (Italian) action . . . to stop the transports" reported to be carrying vast quantities of tanks, aircraft and machine guns from the Soviet Union's Black Sea ports to Republican Spain.[4] If true, such shipments would have been a shocking setback to Mussolini. Already disillusioned by how the civil war in Spain had dragged on, he had speculated in May about trying to force Franco into more active campaigning by threatening to withdraw his troops.[5] Now Franco played on the Duce's disillusionment with the war in Spain; he warned that if action were not taken immediately to stop the Soviet ships, the conflict could continue indefinitely.[6] To clinch his

argument, Franco sent his brother, Nicolas Franco, to Rome as his personal representative, accompanied by the deputy chief of staff of the Nationalist Navy to co-ordinate plans.[7]

Franco did not simply maintain pressure on Mussolini; he continually increased the stakes as he developed his bid for Italian naval support. His vague call on 3 August for "urgent action" soon developed into a specific request for Italian naval ships to track Soviet and Republican vessels and to report their locations to the Nationalists.[8] By 4 August, this request for reconnaisance had evolved into a detailed war plan designed to track, intercept and sink not only Soviet and Spanish ships destined for 'Red' ports, but also any other ships that could be identified as carrying arms.[9] Meeting with Nicolas Franco on 5 August at the Palazzo Venezia, Mussolini approved an Italian naval blockade and ordered the sinking of "enemy or suspicious merchant ships," and the final plan was established on 7 August by Italian and Nationalist naval representatives.[10] Within four days, the Italians had accepted, without any apparent question or qualm, the Spanish proposals for full-scale naval warfare against neutral shipping.[11]

Mussolini's reasons for undertaking this campaign are not clear, but there are obvious factors that would have pressured him to do so. Franco first played on the Duce's fears that the Soviet Union planned to establish an outpost of communism in Spain that would become the focus of Soviet propaganda and military activity in the west.[12] In addition, the promise that prompt action by Italy would hasten Franco's victory would have been an irresistible lure to the Duce. Franco also employed superior tactics; he negotiated Mussolini into a corner. The documents indicate that the Italians were never asked what assistance they could provide; the Spanish always presented them with a ready-made plan of operations to accept or reject. But for Mussolini to have rejected their plans would have implied a lack of fascist solidarity and an unwillingness to take the final step that could end the war. This would have meant a loss of face with his fascist allies. Therefore, the Spanish proposals were a personal challenge to Mussolini to prove his navy's capability, and with the "largest submarine fleet in the world at that time," this was a challenge he could not refuse.[13] Indeed, the speed with which the Italian naval forces were committed suggests that Mussolini was eager to unleash his

submarines on defenceless shipping.

Such prompt action was not, however, as surprising as it might first appear. Although Italy's navy had not been as prominently involved in the Spanish war as her army or airforce, it had also played a not insignificant role in the early stages of that conflict. Documents from the Duce's office show that in the brief period from 1 December, 1936, to 10 January, 1937, fifteen Italian submarines had been deployed in Spanish waters, during which time they had fired eleven torpedoes and sunk one ship.[14] In the summer of 1937, therefore, Mussolini's positive response to Franco's request for naval aid meant changing the status of his naval forces from aggressive neutrality to full scale belligerency. It did not mean unleashing his submarines for the first time. Under these circumstances, his decision to act was probably a foregone conclusion.

Accordingly, Italy undertook to attack neutral shipping at precisely the same time as Britain prepared for talks to restore Anglo-Italian friendship. Mussolini's lack of concern as to how his campaign might affect relations with Britain is best illustrated by a comment he made to some of his cautious admirals in 1935 that he could give "the King of England a slap in the face and get away with it."[15] Unaware of Mussolini's actions, Neville Chamberlain was determined to cash in on the good relations generated by their exchange of letters at the end of July and so had the Foreign Office push ahead with preparations for Italian talks. In the absence of Anthony Eden and many Foreign Office officials, Lord Halifax was charged with this responsibility; a happy arrangement for the prime minister since he and Halifax were in full agreement on policies and Halifax would see that his wishes were carried out.[16] Furthermore, all outward signs were hopeful: Galeazzo Ciano, the Italian foreign minister, had advised Eric Drummond, the British ambassador in Rome, on 2 August that "he would be ready at any moment" to begin talks in Rome, and Halifax encouraged Drummond to maintain this mood and to promote the possibility of talks in late August or early September.[17] Even Robert Vansittart, permanent under-secretary in the Foreign Office, while suggesting that the Italians be kept in play until the British government had decided on an agenda and the course to be followed with respect to *de jure* recognition, seemed content to

begin negotiations at the end of the month.[18]

The prime minister agreed that they should not "rush any fences," but he also stressed that the success of the talks would turn on *de jure* recognition of Italy's sovereignty in Abyssinia. This could not, he believed, be denied indefinitely, as such recognition had a declining "marketable value." It was something they should be prepared to grant if they could get a "substantial" return.[19] This proposal had the outward appearance of traditional appeasement in that it anticipated a *quid pro quo* exchange of benefits, however, two points argue against this. Firstly, Britain would have had to recognize an illegally acquired sovereignty; and secondly, the benefits to Britain could prove to be of little value if all the prime minister gained was his "major desideratum" of the return of Italy to her pre-Abyssinian position accompanied by "some undertaking" to withdraw Italian troops from Spain.[20] In these guidelines Chamberlain had definitely moved away from the norms of traditional appeasement involving a balanced compromise. While not the abject appeasement that was to appear later at Munich, in which a nation's independence was bartered away for empty German promises, there were similarities, particularly since any Italian promises of friendship and future guarantees could prove to be as empty as the later German ones.

The prime minister's comments to Halifax provided the guidelines for a meeting on 10 August between Halifax, Drummond (who was home on leave from Rome), and Foreign Office officials who met to prepare an agenda for Anglo-Italian talks.[21] The meeting decided that the recognition of Italian sovereignty in Abyssinia was "essential in negotiations" and that Britain should take the initiative in raising the question of Abyssinia's status at Geneva.[22] These recommendations had been made by Dino Grandi during his 2 August meeting with Chamberlain, but they do not appear in the prime minister's record of that meeting.[23] The proposed British agenda was, however, overly optimistic in one area. To assume that British concerns (the Italian troops in Spain being one of several examples) could be resolved before facing the thorny question of Abyssinia was to misread completely Italian convictions. The next day, Drummond advised Halifax of his belief that the Italians placed Franco's victory ahead of *de jure* recognition, and he pointed out that this was based not only on Mussolini's

anti-communist attitude, but also the Duce would not "let Franco down in order to obtain advantages for himself."[24]

The important element missing from this discussion was the foreign secretary himself, or for that matter, any other Foreign Office official who opposed giving Italy a blank cheque in return for her promise of good behaviour.[25] In a quick response the next day from his summer home near Southampton, Eden registered his profound disagreement with the proposed agenda for the Italian talks. He objected to granting *de jure* recognition to Italy as this would give "approval for what Italy has done," and his opposition was even more adamant if such approval would help Italy "to make a 'job' of Abyssinia."[26] On 13 August, after further reflection, Eden had become even more entrenched in his opposition to holding discussions in Rome; and this caused Halifax to become concerned at this open challenge to Chamberlain's plans.[27]

II

But a more serious problem was already growing in the Mediterranean—the Italian submarine attacks had begun. As the first reports of the sinkings were received at the Admiralty, the Foreign Office began struggling with two opposing priorities. On the one hand, under Halifax's guidance, they continued to prepare for talks in Rome in late August that would meet Chamberlain's objective of granting *de jure* recognition in return for Italian concessions. On the other hand, this task was made increasingly difficult by the diplomats' parallel search for an acceptable solution to stop the submarine attacks, which were soon tacitly acknowledged to be a new form of Italian aggression.

These attacks also placed the Admiralty in a difficult position, caught between their support of Franco's cause in Spain and their knowledge that the Italian Navy was attacking unarmed, neutral shipping on his behalf. At the political level in London, the Admiralty was staunchly pro-Nationalist, even though their warships had to protect British merchantmen from "energetic intimidation" by the Nationalist Navy.[28] The Admiralty had also correctly assessed how important a friendly Spain was to Britain's Atlantic and Mediterranean trade routes, but in their eyes this could only mean a Nationalist Spain.[29] Therefore, their solution

to the conflict was to grant belligerent rights to both sides and "let them get on with the war."[30] Moreover, Lord Chatfield, the first sea lord, was also using the war in Spain as a "stick with which to beat the Government" in order to hasten the navy's rebuilding and to win a greater degree of independent control in peacetime.[31] He campaigned against the "difficulties and unfair risks" that were forced on the navy by the war, but once he had made his point, he ensured that the navy did its duty. This, he believed, served to enhance the Admiralty's prestige.[32] Yet away from the service politics of London, at least one fleet commander, Sir Dudley Pound in the Mediterranean, saw the navy's role in a positive light. He considered the extra workload imposed by the war as a "godsend to the Navy" which had almost restored it to its level of efficiency prior to the 1931 mutiny.[33]

The same differences in attitude between the Admiralty and Pound appeared when the the attacks began. Jill Edwards notes that by the summer of 1937, the weary Admiralty had no wish to retaliate against the submarines, again they wanted to opt out by awarding belligerent rights.[34] This attitude seems at odds, however, with the decisive response to the submarine attacks proposed by the Admiralty to the Foreign Office on 16 August, until it is recognized that the Admiralty's recommendations were based on a line of action originating with Admiral Pound.[35] Not only did he recommend that the Royal Navy should counter-attack any submarine attacking a British ship; he also strongly suggested that both Spanish governments and the Italian government should be so advised, in case an Italian submarine were sunk by a British vessel.[36] Although Pound's forthright response ran counter to their general attitude towards Italy and Nationalist Spain, the lords of the Admiralty were trapped by circumstances: they knew that the Italian Navy was responsible; they felt obliged to support their fleet commander's recommendations; and they knew that they could not abandon British ships to their fate, a course that Sir George Mounsey in the Foreign Office described as "indefensible to the British public."[37]

Vansittart agreed with the Admiralty's recommendation to give specific warnings to the Spanish and Italian governments, but this was not done.[38] At a joint meeting of cabinet ministers and military staff on 17 August, no reference was made to the possible sinking of an

Italian vessel as a consequence of responding to the submarine attacks.[39] Instead, the Admiralty were authorized by the cabinet ministers present to order the fleet to counter-attack any submarine attacking a British vessel, and a two-sentence press release that confirmed these orders was approved.[40] The net result of this was that a potential confrontation with Italy was avoided in order that the forthcoming talks could proceed.

Although the agreement reached at this meeting did not threaten the proposed Anglo-Italian conversations, Eden and Halifax remained at odds over how such discussions should be carried out. Eden maintained his opposition to any plan to exchange *de jure* recognition for vague Italian promises. Halifax continued to support the prime minister's view that granting recognition could be justified if it led to the restoration of Anglo-Italian friendship as part of a general agreement. But Halifax had not yet warned Chamberlain of Eden's attitude, which he considered to be "dangerously divergent."[41] Finally on 19 August in order to break the deadlock, Halifax told the prime minister that Eden did not wish to be seen as bargaining away recognition of Italy's conquest in return for advantages accruing solely to Britain.[42] In addition, he told Chamberlain that Eden questioned Mussolini's sincerity and that he argued once Italy had gained recognition in Abyssinia, relations would quickly deteriorate again; thus Britain must protect herself against the moral and political mischief he foresaw.[43] And since Eden and Halifax had obviously reached an impasse, they agreed to ask Chamberlain to return to London for a meeting to resolve their differences.[44]

Their meeting was set for 25 August, and in anticipation of it, Eden sought naval support for his diplomatic initiatives.[45] In a discussion with the Admiralty, Eden requested an additional show of force in the Mediterranean that would give the impression to the world that special steps were being taken, in order to back up a diplomatic note that he planned to send to Rome that day regarding the attacks in the Mediterranean.[46] Eden failed; the Admiralty would not support his proposal for a show of force, and only agreed that a press release could be made confirming their intention to maintain their current naval strength in the Mediterranean. Yet even this was conditional on obtaining the prime minister's approval. Thus Eden had weakened his position. Instead of finding support from the Admiralty, he had

to go hat in hand to Chamberlain to obtain his approval of an announcement that would be of little value in the foreign secretary's approach to Rome.

This approval was obtained, but more importantly, the gap between Eden and Chamberlain was patched over by agreeing that the talks with Italy should be delayed until after the League of Nations assembly in mid-September.[47] This decision also reflected the British hope that the League might have to deal with the problem of Abyssinia before they had to face the same issue in their Italian conversations. There was no suggestion that Britain would raise the Abyssinian topic for debate at Geneva, and no references were to be made to Britain's still undefined intentions, prior to the League meeting.[48] In any event, the talks in Rome were justifiably delayed as the result of a death in Drummond's family, which kept him in Britain until well into September.[49] The decision to postpone the talks, for which a specific date had never been set, was kept from Ciano, although he accepted at face value the reasons given for Lord Perth's (Drummond's) delayed return to Rome.[50]

Although the delay in the Anglo-Italian talks postponed a showdown between Eden and the prime minister, the problem of the Italian submarine attacks remained. Initially, Britain tried without success to use the pending talks with Italy as a bargaining tool in their appeals to Rome. But they were careful that this action on their part was not known publicly; they feared pressure from the French and others "to make it an international question."[51] Eden's first dispatch regarding the submarine attacks, sent via Maurice Ingram, the British chargé d'affaires in Rome, was brazenly rebuffed by Ciano on 23 August.[52] Eden's next note on 25 August fared little better. While he suggested to Ingram that the time had come for "some frankness" between the countries, and for the first time intimated to Ciano that recent incidents in the Mediterranean must "be due to Italian activities," he did not express concern over the attacks themselves, only that nothing should be done to affect adversely the coming conversations.[53] This lack of success is not surprising. The stand-pat press release made on 25 August that merely confirmed Britain's intention to maintain her current naval strength in the Mediterranean would not have struck fear into many Italian hearts, nor would it have provided any useful support for the message that Eden sent to Rome that day.

These mild protests, therefore, did not intimidate Mussolini who was certain that he could flout the British government, but they marked the change in emphasis that had been forced on Britain in its approach to Italy. When Chamberlain had left on holidays on 2 August, the whole diplomatic effort had been focussed upon the Anglo-Italian talks. Now British diplomacy faced the more intense challenge of direct Italian aggression. At the same time, the development of the attacks in the Mediterranean had gradually strengthened Eden's position relative to that of Chamberlain, because the sharp response favoured by Eden was more likely to succeed.[54] On the other hand, Chamberlain's attempt to maintain the new détente with Italy through the series of wrist-slapping notes he authorized Eden to send was certain to fail. Nevertheless, Eden was unable to take advantage of his stronger tactical position.[55] Lacking support from his cabinet colleagues and at war with the Admiralty, Eden needed to win support from the absent prime minister if he hoped to stop the sinkings in the Mediterranean. And to win that support, he needed a strong position to offset Chamberlain's push for an Anglo-Italian understanding. By late August, Eden had found that strong position by championing a French proposal to hold a conference to deal with Mediterranean problems. In this he was greatly aided by two Italian miscalculations that swung British public opinion decisively against Italy. The first error made by Mussolini was to send a congratulatory public message to Franco, on 27 August, extolling the part played by Italian troops in the capture of the Spanish city of Santander.[56] The French government, who had tried to keep their Spanish border closed to the shipment of war material to the Spanish Republic, were incensed by this action. But Eden successfully opposed their efforts to challenge Italy, as it would only distract from their joint efforts to stop the Mediterranean attacks.[57] The boost this bellicose message gave to Mussolini's vanity and to his public support in Italy was offset diplomatically by the negative response from the British public who saw it as ridiculing the principles of non-intervention. Five days later, on 1 September, a second error occurred which further stiffened British resolve towards Italy: the Italian submarine *Iride* launched an unsuccessful torpedo attack on the British destroyer *Havock*.[58]

Public reaction in Britain was swift and predictable. Its predictability lay not just in the overwhelming condemnation of the attack, but also in the variation of the responses from the newspapers. *The Times*, whose editor, Geoffrey Dawson, supported a general policy of appeasement, softened its reaction as much as possible, while *The Manchester Guardian*, on the other hand, spoke out for simple justice: identify the guilty and punish them. In its news story, *The Times* referred to the general feeling that "nothing can justify the 'unrestricted' attacks," but its editorial was more circumspect.[59] Here the attack was viewed in the context of all Mediterranean attacks, the German reaction over the attack on the *Deutschland* was viewed with sympathy, both Spanish governments were condemned for their actions, but finally, prompt counter-attacks were recommended as the only answer, "whatever the identity of the pirates."[60] The *Guardian*, more representative of public opinion, left no doubt as to where it thought the guilt lay. In a background story, it noted the negative effect the attacks were having on the "prospect of Anglo-Italian reconciliation" because there was no doubt that "these acts of 'piracy' are Italian" in origin.[61] The editorial in the *Guardian* also condemned Italy by name and ended with the message that Italy must learn that she "cannot make a mockery of international agreements and defy all principles of law."[62] With such a response coming on the heels of the public's angry reaction to Mussolini's congratulatory message to Franco, there was no serious opposition to Eden's backing of the French proposal for a Mediterranean conference.

III

The French initiative also helped to resolve the conflict between Eden and the Admiralty over granting belligerent rights in the Spanish war. The Admiralty believed that if these rights were granted to both Spanish governments, the Nationalists would be able to stop ships bound for Republican ports to check registries and, if necessary, confiscate cargoes. Therefore, there would be no reason for them to sink neutral ships indiscriminately on the suspicion that they were carrying war materials.[63] There is a sense of unreality in this discussion between the Admiralty and Eden. Eden was described by the Admiralty as not grasping all of the legalities involved in granting belligerent rights; while the Admiralty spoke

of not giving Franco and the Italians (whose presence they accepted without comment) any "excuse" to attack British ships, as if justifiable excuses could have existed under any circumstances.[64] What this theory overlooked is that normally the interception of ships is the work of easily identifiable surface vessels, whereas the most practical way for Mussolini to lend naval support to Franco was to cloak it in the anonymity of submarine warfare. Moreover, the Admiralty did not consider that the formal recognition of the Nationalists as a *de facto* government (as indeed they were, but were not so recognized) would normally be a condition precedent to granting belligerent rights, and this added a political aspect that not even Eden addressed.[65] He disagreed with the Admiralty on different grounds, claiming that the attacks would continue, with or without belligerent rights, unless there was a guarantee of retaliation. He suggested that, if attacks still continued, the Nationalist cruiser *Canaris* should be sunk by the British. In response, the Admiralty realistically noted that for retaliation to be effective it would have to be carried out against the Italians, not the Spanish.[66] Eden's wish to take retaliatory action against the Nationalists was noted by Chatfield. He believed that if Eden had had his way, he would have announced a plan of immediate retaliation against Franco if any further attacks were made on British ships and, moreover, the foreign secretary would have liked this policy affirmed by the reinforcement of British naval forces in the Mediterranean.[67] Chatfield's concern was that even though Eden was targetting the Nationalists, any threat of retaliation against an Italian ally ran counter to the recommendation by the chiefs of staff that relations with Italy should be improved. This, he believed, reflected the official government policy.[68]

Two Admiralty memoranda dated 1 September provided more ammunition for the navy to use at a meeting of ministers the following day. The first of these considered the use of retaliation in a way that would avoid Britain becoming the "laughing stock of Europe" by some ill-conceived act.[69] By hearkening back to Eden's suggestion to the Admiralty that the *Canaris* should be sunk and then projecting equally extreme possibilities—a blockade, raids on Spanish ports (considered rather "Hunnish"), or the seizure of Majorca—the author ridiculed both Eden and his suggestions.[70] Curiously, his conclusion that the best protection for British

ships would be intensive naval patrols in the areas of sinkings, contradicted Chatfield's conclusions in the other Mediterranean memorandum written that day in which he recommended convoys as the only answer to the attacks.[71]

Still uncertain of Chamberlain's support or the Admiralty's co-operation, Eden turned to the French proposal for a Mediterranean conference as his best opportunity to end the submarine attacks. The fact that the French suggested such a conference indicated their intense concern with developments in the Mediterranean, especially since Mussolini's telegram. But such direct involvement almost seemed contrary to their general policies. By the summer of 1937, Léon Blum had been replaced as the head of the French Popular Front government by Camille Chautemps, whose policy was "one of drift" and whose attitude was "one of wait and see."[72] But the Mediterranean could not wait. The submarine attacks had threatened French shipping and could force France to support an anticipated call by the Spanish Republic for action against Italian aggression when the League of Nations convened in September.[73] The French proposal to Eden on 26 August for a special meeting of French, British and Italian officials to defuse the Mediterranean situation was their solution to this problem. There was no hint in this proposal of any intention to criticize Italy's recent activities, nor to threaten her with any form of retaliation. While Eden welcomed the proposal in principle, he initially questioned whether the French plan would produce practical results.[74]

He continued to seek practical solutions for the Mediterranean crisis at the cabinet meeting on 2 September and recommended the still vague French proposal for discussions as the best means of achieving the desired results.[75] He had also won agreement from Chamberlain (who was still absent from London) that Britain could hardly refuse to discuss Mediterranean problems in Geneva.[76] Thus, the foreign secretary's participation in tripartite talks with France and Italy was approved before an agenda had been established, and it was on this basis that Eden maintained his position as this vague proposal evolved into the Nyon Conference. Moreover, the mood of the cabinet had changed sufficiently to endorse an increase in naval strength in the Mediterranean and to authorize the foreign secretary to make urgent representations to the Italian government regarding the continued submarine attacks.[77]

The results of this meeting represented a remarkable recovery in Eden's fortunes. A month earlier, in his second meeting with Grandi on 2 August, Chamberlain had effectively taken over the direction of foreign policy with respect to Italy. Now, riding the wave of aroused anti-Italian public opinion, the foreign secretary had obtained blanket approval to continue what were still open-ended talks with Paris on the submarine problem; he was getting some show of the naval strength in the Mediterranean which he had previously been denied; and an even stronger message would go to the Italians, although there could have been little hope as to the efficacy of this latter action.

Despite the free rein he was given, Eden was careful to do everything possible to avoid direct confrontation with Italy, while still pursuing his primary objective of stopping the Italian attacks. It is apparent that he was fully conscious of Chamberlain's wish to bridge the gap with Italy. In a personal aide-memoire written in Scotland, probably on 2 September, Chamberlain identified his primary objective as the establishment of "peace" between Britain and Italy; this, he believed, would have the secondary advantage of weakening the Rome-Berlin Axis, which he considered to be "extremely artificial."[78] He was equally certain that Italy's conquest of Abyssinia must be recognized, although this would have to be done as part of a total agreement so that it would not involve a selfish advantage to Britain. This appears to be very similar to Eden's position, but there was a vital difference. The foreign secretary would have required the Italians to make good on any new promises before Britain acted; there was no indication that the prime minister was not prepared to continue to accept promises of good faith without any evidence of performance.[79] In this regard, Chamberlain dismissed the possibility that Mussolini could later break his promises, because he believed that the Duce was too frightened of Britain to risk tearing up an agreement.[80] This interesting memorandum not only summarizes the prime minister's views on foreign policy with respect to Italy, but it also emphasizes how much his plans were based on naive perceptions and how little they reflected the hard lessons of past experience or logical future expectations. In addition, a note attached to the prime minister's memorandum indicates that, on his return to London, he had shown these notes to Halifax, who had generally agreed with them, but they

had not been shown to Eden.[81]

Yet in early September this slight would have been incidental to Eden who was finally achieving some diplomatic success in his Mediterranean discussions with France. The new Anglo-French accord provided a near-perfect diplomatic balance. The French contributed the sense of urgency that gave the initiative life and purpose; the British supplied the organization and the terms of reference, being careful that they challenged the unknown submarines without challenging Italy in any way. The only serious Anglo-French problem to be resolved was the question of whom to invite to the conference, and their new alliance almost foundered on this unexpectedly contentious issue. Despite France's original plans for a tripartite conference, by 1 September Eden noted that the new proposal to include Mediterranean and Black Sea states contemplated Italy's exclusion.[82] By implication, this would have branded Italy as the country reponsible for the attacks, which was contrary to Britain's wishes. Hence, Eden made strong representations to Paris and after "vigorous discussions" and the threat of a French government resignation if their Soviet ally were not invited, he and the French agreed to a trade-off. The Soviet Union, Italy and Germany were all included on the invitation list.[83] Subsequently, Anglo-French invitations were sent on 5 September to the approved list of countries inviting them to attend a Mediterranean conference at Nyon on 10 September.

The dispatch of the invitations produced a flurry of activity in London and Rome on 6 September. In London, the Foreign Office and the Admiralty agreed on a proposed agenda that focussed on the submarine problem to the exclusion of air and surface attacks.[84] In an abandonment of their previous position, the Admiralty insisted that patrol areas not be the responsibility of one country, and that it should be announced that if the planned conference failed, the navy would hunt any submarines attacking merchant ships of any nationality.[85] The change in the Admiralty's approach reflected the new realities forced on them by the attack on the British destroyer *Havock* and later the sinking of the British tanker *Woodford*. Lord Chatfield's return to London at the end of August may also have influenced this change. He was likely to be more attuned to the politicians and the mood of the country than his

Admiralty colleagues.[16] The new spirit of co-operation between the Foreign Office and the Admiralty indicated a compromise by both sides: the diplomats now agreed that the only acceptable form of retaliation was to sink the submarines rather than take retribution against Nationalist Spain, and the navy finally adopted the view that the submarines were international pirates and should be treated as such, whether Spanish or Italian. These became the principles that Eden and Chatfield were to impose on the conference at Nyon, while allowing the submarines to retain their cloak of anonymity so as to avoid any criticism of Italian actions.

On the same day in Rome, the delivery of the Nyon invitation ended almost two weeks of uncertainty regarding Britain's intentions. The period leading up to the Nyon Conference was one of the few times in the late 1930s when the Axis powers did not 'call the shot' in European affairs. The Italians had been particularly uneasy since the unscheduled cabinet meeting in London on 25 August. Sir Orme Sargent, an under-secretary in the Foreign Office, had glossed over the matter by giving non-committal, soothing answers to the concerned inquiries from the Italian chargé d'affaires, Guido Crolla.[17] As the plans for the conference were being set, both Sargent and Vansittart stressed to Crolla how important it was for Italy to attend the conference in order to stop the flagrant violations of international law in the Mediterranean.[18] Crolla's anxious inquiries in London at this time, which could only have been carried out with Ciano's direct authorization, gave the lie to the Italian foreign minister's studied indifference in Rome to the British expressions of concern regarding the attacks. The reality behind this indifference was shown even more clearly by Ciano's suspension of the submarine campaign on 4 September.[19] He gave no reasons for this action, but they must have been urgent, because he cancelled the attacks despite a plea from Franco to continue them until the end of September in order to achieve decisive results.[20] Perhaps it was the near miss on the *Havock*, or the stronger ties being forged between Britain and France, or a need to be able to claim at Nyon that Italy was not carrying out attacks; but whatever his reason, the submarines had been recalled by the time Ciano received Italy's official invitation to Nyon on 6 September. Despite the fact that the British had broken the

Italian naval code, it remains unclear as to when Eden was made aware that Ciano had called off the attacks, although several sources claim that he knew before the conference began.[91]

Ciano maintained that the Italian government would have responded favourably to the Nyon invitation had they not received Soviet notes accusing Italy of sinking two of their steamers and demanding compensation, and this made it impossible for Italy to attend a conference at which the Soviets would be present.[92] According to a contemporary account, this had been precisely the Soviet objective. They had feared that Britain, France and Italy would form a front against them, or that the Italo-German alliance would divert discussions to the Non-Intervention Committee.[93] They had correctly calculated that they could remove Italy and Germany without killing the conference. It was on this point that Ciano made a critical error in judgement; he assumed that the conference would not proceed without Italy and, therefore, he believed that the Soviets had "torpedoed" the conference.[94] Ingram had also misunderstood the Soviets' intentions; he believed that they had "played into Italian hands" by giving them an excuse to avoid a conference "for which they clearly had no great taste."[95] On his part, Eden stressed the overriding need to deal with Mediterranean piracy and the value of the conference as a precursor to Anglo-Italian talks, while at the same time pointing out that the best way to frustrate Soviet attempts to scuttle the conference would be for Italy to take part.[96] It should be noted that Eden carefully followed Chamberlain's wishes to foster good relations with Italy and thus encouraged Italian participation at every opportunity. Nevertheless, this was conciliation from strength, because Eden never made Italy's presence at the conference an absolute essential for it to proceed. As a result, neither Eden nor Yvon Delbos, the French foreign minister, ever considered cancelling the conference as a result of Italy's refusal. Therefore, every effort by Italy, Germany, and even Ingram, to have the venue changed to the Non-Intervention Committee was firmly rejected by the Foreign Office, until finally on 9 September, both Italy and Germany officially declined the invitation to Nyon.[97]

As the likelihood of an Italian refusal increased, Eden reshaped his plans to accommodate the new circumstances. Events played into his hands in such a way that he was able to take the initiative in Anglo-Italian relations away from Chamberlain. In this he was

helped by the fact that the prime minister did not return to London until 6 September. He met with Eden the next day to discuss the situation with what he considered to be "very useful results." He believed that he was able to help his foreign secretary "quite a lot," and while the conditions in the Mediterranean were disturbing, he did not think that they were as bad as they seemed.[91] In spite of their discussion on 7 September, it is unlikely that Chamberlain had any influence on the working paper that Eden prepared that day for cabinet which proposed to establish a system of naval patrols that would be operated without Italian assistance.[99]

The cabinet meeting on 8 September dealt with two forms of aggression: the Japanese in the Far East and the Italian in the Mediterranean.[100] While Chamberlain could not have been happy about being forced to challenge Italy in any way, Eden's proposals had the virtue of necessity, and all the prime minister could do was to ease the potential strain on Italian sensibilities. Therefore, he recommended that Italy be kept informed of the conference proceedings, and he raised a number of criticisms regarding Eden's proposals on which the foreign secretary either gave way or promised to keep the prime minister's wishes in mind.[101] Chamberlain's strongest criticism was levelled at Eden's recommendation (from the Admiralty) that Soviet warships be included in the Aegean patrols. In his reaction, the prime minister exhibited western Europe's historical fear of allowing the Soviet Navy into the Mediterranean, and he also expressed his personal anxiety to avoid a situation "in which the Great Powers become grouped into blocs."[102] The fact that in this case Britain could have found herself in the same bloc as the Soviet Union would obviously have increased Chamberlain's concern. Yet his objection to Soviet participation is strangely muted. While he considered the proposal to be "highly dubious" and "open to serious objection," he did not condemn it outright. He even went so far as to say that his worry "would be mitigated, to some extent, if Powers like Turkey and Yugo Slavia participated in the scheme."[103] Although the point is not clear, this suprisingly temperate reaction may indicate that Chamberlain already knew Ciano had called off the submarines and, therefore, it was not likely that the Soviets would be needed.

Then on a broader issue, this meeting saw the first open conflict between Chamberlain and Eden over Britain's future Italian policy. Again Eden argued that *de jure* recognition could only be granted as part of a general European settlement and not as a "nefarious bargain" only involving Anglo-Italian interests.[104] In his rebuttal, Chamberlain tried to sustain his point of view by the quantity rather than by the quality of his argument. He cited the "rejoicing" in Italy at the news of his letter to Mussolini; he blamed the French for much of Italy's anti-British feeling; he used Italian excuses for the Duce's reinforcements in Libya; and he invoked the call by the chiefs of staff for a reduction in tensions.[105] But even though Chamberlain recognized that Eden "found it difficult in going quite so far as he" in seeking an understanding with Italy, he failed to shake Eden's resolve. The matter was settled temporarily by an agreement to send Ciano a conciliatory eleventh hour invitation to Nyon which deliberately made no references to possible future discussions of the Abyssinian question.[106]

While Chamberlain and Eden clashed at this cabinet meeting, it is incorrect to suggest, as Keith Middlemas does, that Eden pushed ahead with Nyon in order to thwart the possibility of Chamberlain referring the submarine question to the Non-Intervention Committee.[107] This must come from a misreading of Eden's memoirs, because he states that he only learned later of the prime minister's second thoughts.[108] The Foreign Office records not only confirm Eden's version, they also show that Chamberlain never contemplated a pull back from Nyon. On the day the conference began, the prime minister wrote to his secretary from Scotland asking him to obtain the Foreign Office's opinion on the possibility of referring the submarine problem to the committee.[109] By the time this inquiry reached London, was referred to the Foreign Office, and their negative response received, the conference was over and the problem had been dealt with.[110] Chamberlain's best, and last, opportunity to raise this option was at the cabinet meeting on 8 September, and even then his support on the issue might have been limited to Hoare, Halifax and Simon.

Therefore, when Eden left for Nyon the next day, he had the cabinet's blessings, subject to Chamberlain's two guidelines. These were: to do everything possible to exclude the

Soviets from the Mediterranean, and to keep the Italians as fully informed as possible regarding the conference deliberations; both of which were in keeping with Eden's own wishes. And if he succeeded at the conference in halting the submarine attacks once and for all, Eden could well afford to follow Chamberlain's wishes, especially if it meant informing the Italian government of such success. This was a measure of how far Eden had rebounded from his minor role during Chamberlain's meetings with Grandi only a month earlier, and he left for Nyon, once more the personification of British diplomacy.

Notes

1 CHT/4/72-77, Chatfield to Pound, 5 August, 1937. Even Dino Grandi, the Italian ambassador, who noted that "Londra è deserta," (ASME, SRD, Londra, 1937, 963/3, Grandi to Ciano, 4 August, 1937.) was soon to leave, and most foreign diplomatic responsibilities in London, Rome, Paris and Berlin would be exercised by each nation's chargés d'affaires until well into September.

2 Ibid.

3 The Japanese diplomatic initiative is summarized in Mario Toscano, *The Origins of the Pact of Steel* (Baltimore, 1967), pp. 8-9.

4 ASME, SAP, US 2, 2/27, Franco to Mussolini, 3 August, 1937. A German report (*DGFP*, III, No. 407, Weizsäcker to Hassell, 4 August, 1937.) referred to the incredible quantities of Soviet war materials claimed by Franco to be in the shipments, including "100 heavy, 500 medium and 2,000 light tanks; 3,000 motorized machine guns; 300 planes, and tens of thousands of machine guns." As Weizsäcker pointed out, the report seemed "exaggerated."

5 LP 14/238-241, Colloquio del Duce col Ministro von Neurath, 3 May, 1937. Mussolini had told Constantin von Neurath, the German foreign minister, that if Franco had not begun to campaign more forcefully by the end of May, he might consider withdrawing his forces from Spain. While only a bluff, Franco would be made aware of Mussolini's eagerness to end the conflict.

6 ASME, SAP, US 2, 2/29, Embajada de España en Italia: Nota para S. E. El Conde Ciano, Undated (probably 4 August, 1937).

7 *DGFP*, III, No. 408, Hassell to Foreign Ministry, 5 August, 1937.

8 ASME, SAP, US 2, 2/27, Franco to Mussolini, 3 August, 1937; and *DGFP*, III, No. 407, Weizsäcker to Hassell, 4 August, 1937.

9 ASME, SAP, US 2, 2/29, Embajada de España Italia: Nota para S. E. El Conde Ciano, Undated (probably 4 August, 1937).

10 ASME, SAP, US 2, 2/27, Processo verbale (Reunione a Palazzo Venezia), 5 August, 1937; and ASME, SAP, US 2, 2/29, Colloquio tra il Capo di Gabinetto ed il Sottocapo di Stato Maggiore della Marina spagnola, 7 August, 1937. Even though at the meeting on 5 August Mussolini was prepared to order his navy to sink defenceless ships, he refused to transfer outdated Italian naval vessels to the Nationalists. He cited a fear of provoking an international incident, presumably because this action would have contravened the conditions of Annex II (the disposal of vessels of war) of the 1930 Treaty of London. (See *British and Foreign State Documents*, 1930, Pt. I, Vol. 132 (London, 1935), p. 609.)

11 In addition to stopping Soviet shipments, Franco was motivated by a desire to involve Mussolini even more deeply in the Spanish war. Germany shared this motive which could explain a possible German origin for Franco's request for assistance. Frank, "Civil War," p. 382, notes that in June, 1937, the German Navy planned its own Mediterranean submarine campaign in order to "keep the Mediterranean boiling." When Adolf Hitler dropped this plan, it would be a natural consequence to encourage the Nationalists to turn to Italy, whose even greater involvement in the war would directly benefit Franco and indirectly benefit Hitler. The best summary of Italo-German naval operations in the Spanish Civil War is in Willard C. Frank, Jr., "Naval Operations in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939," *Naval War College Review*, 37, 1, 1984, pp. 24-55.

12 ASME, SAP, US 2, 2/27, Franco to Mussolini, 3 August, 1937. For a discussion of why "nothing was further from the Soviet government's intentions than a satellite Spain," see Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence*, p. 245.

13 Thomas, *Civil War*, p. 739. The comparative figures quoted are: 83 Italian submarines, 76 French and 57 British. Italy's advantage in the Mediterranean would be greater than these figures indicate because of her central location.

14 ACS, SPD, CR, 72/463/R-6, Contributo della R. Marina alle Operazioni O.M.S. dal 1 dicembre 1936 al 10 gennaio 1937, Allegato no. 2. See also Paolo M. Pollina, *Ufficio Storico della Marina Militare: I sommergibili italiani 1895-1962* (Rome, 1963), pp. 145, 210, 225 and 231, for references to Italian submarine operations on Franco's behalf in 1936. According to Frank, "Naval Operations," pp. 34-37, two German submarines also operated briefly in Spanish waters in early December, 1936.

15 Brian R. Sullivan, "A Fleet in Being: The Rise and Fall of Italian Sea Power, 1861-1943," *The International History Review*, 10, 1, February, 1988, p. 118. Although this statement had been made during the Abyssinian crisis, by 1937 Mussolini was even more confident of his ability to pull the British lion's tail and get away with it.

16 In a letter to a sister on 8 August, Chamberlain referred to the diplomats as if they were children not to be trusted: "I can see if left to themselves there would be a danger of their letting pass the critical moment." (Rose, "Resignation," p. 914.)

17 Drummond's report on his meeting is in *DBFP*, XIX, No. 82, Drummond to Foreign Office, 3 August, 1937; and Halifax's instructions are in PRO: PREM 1/267, pp. 309-310, Halifax to Drummond, 4 August, 1937.

18 PRO: PREM 1/267, pp. 306-308, Vansittart to Halifax, 3 August, 1937; and PRO: PREM 1/ 267, pp. 303-305, Halifax to Chamberlain, 4 August, 1937. Despite his anti-French reputation, Halifax also recognized the need to keep the French "very fully informed" of the negotiations.

19 AVON 13/123-125, Chamberlain to Halifax, 7 August, 1937.

20 Ibid. Chamberlain also noted that dictators were "men of moods," and if you caught them

at the right time, they would "give you anything." For all of Chamberlain's naivete as far as applying this to Britain's approach to Italy, he had essentially described Franco's recent experience with Mussolini.

21 PRO: PREM 1/267, pp. 260-281, Foreign Office meeting, 10 August, 1937. The holiday depletion of Foreign Office ranks is evident in this group who, in addition to Halifax, Drummond and Vansittart, included members from the Egyptian, Legal, and League Affairs Departments, but no one from the Southern Department which was responsible for Italian affairs.

22 Ibid. In the event, Britain took no action at Geneva.

23 ASME, SRD, Londra, 1937, 963/3, Grandi colloquio con Chamberlain, 2 August, 1937; and *DBFP*, XIX, No. 80, Chamberlain memorandum, 2 August, 1937.

24 PRO: PREM 1/267, p. 282, Drummond to Halifax, 11 August, 1937. For once Drummond accurately read the Italian mind, but he may also have been preparing London for disappointment once he opened discussions with Ciano.

25 See Middlemas, *Diplomacy*, pp. 70-73, for a discussion of Foreign Office power blocs in the 1930s which compromised the Foreign Office's former "monolithic authority."

26 AVON 13/152-153, Eden to Halifax, 11 August, 1937. This last comment referred to the fact that a bitter guerrilla war continued in Abyssinia, sustained in part by Italy's lack of *de jure* authority. Eden also gave vent to his frustration with Franco. He suggested that it was almost time "for us to seize a cargo or two of his and hold them until he behaves!"

27 Peters, *Eden*, pp. 287-288. Halifax felt some understanding for Eden's reluctance to deal with "Machiavellian gangsters," but true to his commitment to Chamberlain, he opposed any delay in opening talks with Italy.

28 Edwards, *British Government*, p. 102; and Carlton, *Eden*, pp. 86-87. The description of Nationalist tactics is from ASME, SAP, US 2, 2/29, Colloquio tra il Capo di Gabinetto ed il Sottocapo di Stato Maggiore della Marina spagnola, 7 August, 1937.

29 Stephen Roskill, *Naval Policy Between the Wars, 1919-1939*, Vol. II (London, 1976), p. 380.

30 Ibid. Because of their more active navy and their already belligerent allies, the Nationalists would be the principal beneficiaries if belligerent rights were granted—there was no possibility that a Republican naval vessel would be allowed to intercept an Italian supply or troop ship. All of which emphasized the exceptional situation in the Spanish war: neither the legitimate government nor the insurgents were recognized as holding belligerent rights. D.P. O'Connell, *International Law*, Vol. I, (London, 1970), p. 151, does not accept the explanation that this occurred because the presence of volunteers on both sides made it impossible to treat this as a civil war. As he points out, if it was not a civil war, then it had to be an international war, in

which case the right to exercise belligerent rights was *a fortiori*. This was an example, therefore, of political realities overriding international law.

31 Edwards, *British Government*, p.102.

32 CHT/4/10/65-68, Chatfield to Pound, 2 July, 1937.

33 CHT/4/10/69-71, Pound to Chatfield, 14 July, 1937.

34 Edwards, *British Government*, p. 119.

35 PRO: FO 371/21358, pp. 5-15, Mounsey to Vansittart, 16 August, 1937. In this note, Mounsey had summarized the recommendations that the Admiralty had sent to the Foreign Office for their comments.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid. Even then Vansittart thought the proposed actions were "rather too mild."

39 PRO: FO 371/21357, pp. 201-210, Meeting of Ministers, 17 August, 1937. Eden came into London for the day to attend this meeting.

40 Ibid. Eden did not object to this arrangement, although he and Duff Cooper argued against delaying its implementation for a day until Chamberlain's approval was obtained. However, it is difficult to see this as "something of a triumph for the Foreign Secretary" simply on the basis that the meeting "resulted in a firm and public warning" (Edwards, *British Government*, p. 119.), since this step was much less drastic than the specific warnings that had first been proposed.

41 Peters, *Eden*, p. 288. This comment is in a note from Halifax to Vansittart dated 15 August, 1937.

42 PRO: PREM 1/267, pp. 246-249, Halifax to Chamberlain, 19 August, 1937. Halifax's interpretation of Eden's position is very different from the foreign secretary's adamant stand against *de jure* recognition on 11 and 13 August. (AVON 13/152-153, Eden to Halifax, 11 August, 1937; and Peters, *Eden*, pp. 287-288.) While Eden spoke of *de jure* recognition being possible in the context of a general settlement, he always did so on the basis that Italian undertakings must be performed before such recognition was granted. See Avon, *Memoirs*, p. 516.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid. Halifax's indolent attitude towards affairs of state appears in this letter. He hoped that the prime minister would not call the meeting for the following Monday as he was "shooting grouse with Geoffrey Dawson" (editor of *The Times* and a staunch supporter of appeasement) that day. There were no other cabinet ministers who would have tested Chamberlain's goodwill so gratuitously, and this comment says much about their working relationship.

45 This was an uncharacteristic step by Eden who was generally indifferent to the link between diplomacy and military power that was so emphasized by the chiefs of staff. (Carlton, *Eden*, pp. 93-96.

46 PRO: ADM 116/3522/MO4630/37, Note of Conversation between Foreign Secretary and A.C.N.S.(Air), 25 August, 1937.

47 *DBFP*, XIX, No. 106, Sargent to Perth, 27 August, 1937, summarized the conclusions reached at the 25 August meeting.

48 Ibid.

49 On the death of his half-brother, Eric Drummond became Lord Perth, and this title will be used hereafter.

50 Ciano, *Diplomatic Papers*, pp. 135-136. For Ciano's comment on 25 August that he still believed he was "on the eve of (his) negotiations with Great Britain," see Galeazzo Ciano, *Ciano's Hidden Diary 1937-1938* (New York, 1953), p. 4.

51 PRO: FO 371/21358, p. 1, Roberts memorandum, 21 August, 1937.

52 *DBFP*, XIX, No. 99, Foreign Office to Ingram, 20 August, 1937; PRO: FO 371/21358, pp. 76-79, Ingram to Eden, 23 August, 1937 (*DBFP*, XIX, No. 100.); Ciano, *Diary*, p. 3; and Ciano, *Diplomatic Papers*, pp. 134-135.

53 *DBFP*, XIX, No. 102, Eden to Ingram, 25 August, 1937; PRO: FO 371/21358, pp 147-148, Ingram to Eden, 27 August, 1937; and Ciano, *Diplomatic Papers*, p. 136. Ingram indicated that his reception by Ciano on this occasion was not entirely cordial.

54 It is important to emphasize that Eden was proposing retaliatory action against Nationalist Spain, not Italy.

55 Eden's isolation was underlined in odd ways such as the tone of disrespect that appears in a note to Chamberlain from his private secretary who advised the prime minister that he need not return to London just because Eden was "in an excitable mood and feeling the need for support." (PRO: PREM 1/267, pp. 205-213, Cleverly to Chamberlain, 31 August, 1937.)

56 ACS, SPD, CR, 72/463/R-5-D, Telegramma del Duce al Generale Franco, 27 August, 1937.

57 There are a number of references to Eden's diversionary tactics. See, for instance, PRO: FO 371/21358, 230-232, Eden to Lloyd Thomas, 2 September, 1937; and Chamberlain's agreement with Eden's actions is on PRO: PREM 1/267, pp. 202-203, Chamberlain to Cleverly, 2 September, 1937

58 Ciano acknowledged this attack as an error. (Ciano, *Diary*, p. 8.)

59 "The Attacked Destroyer," *The Times*, 2 September, 1937, p. 12.

60 "The Pirates," *The Times*, 2 September, 1937, p. 13.

61 "British Warship Attacked by Submarine," *The Manchester Guardian*, 2 September, 1937, p. 9.

62 "The Pirates," *The Manchester Guardian*, 2 September, 1937, p. 8. On this day, both editorials had the same title.

63 PRO: ADM 116/3522/MO4769/37, Admiralty memorandum (probably by Admiral J.H.D. Cunningham), Undated, but refers to a meeting on 31 August.

64 For a summary of belligerent rights, see Charles G. Fenwick, *International Law* (New York, 1965), p. 166. Edwards, *British Government*, p. 107, points out that in 1936 the Admiralty had opposed granting belligerent rights when such rights would have been primarily exercised by the Republicans.

65 An account of the precise relationship between *de facto* government status and the exercise of belligerent rights is found in O'Connell, *International Law*, pp. 87-88.

66 PRO: ADM 116/3522/MO4769/37, Admiralty memorandum (probably Cunningham), Undated. The Admiralty's lack of moral judgements about Italy's submarine campaign contrasts strongly with references in Italian records to their navy's distaste for this assignment. Examples include, "When his naval commanders raised moral and practical objections, Mussolini told them to redouble the number of attacks" (Mack Smith, *Mussolini*, p. 212.); "Cavagnari's (commander of the Italian Navy) attitude infuriated Mussolini" (Sullivan, "A Fleet in Being," p. 118.); and Ciano ended the navy's legalistic resistance "by blowing up Cavagnari" (Ciano, *Diary*, p. 6.).

67 PRO: ADM 116/3522/MO4769/37, Chief of Naval Staff memorandum, 31 August, 1937.

68 Ibid.; and *DBFP*, XIX, No. 91, Report of the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee of the C.I.D. on Anglo-Italian Relations, 12 August, 1937. The gap between the Admiralty and the

Foreign Office is indicated by Chatfield's comment that the Foreign Office had declined to advise him of the contents of the most recent diplomatic note sent to Rome.

69 PRO: ADM 116/3522/MO4769/37, Director of Planning memorandum, 1 September, 1937.

70 Ibid. Still, the Admiralty's opinion was changing, as was indicated by the director of planning's comment that a plan "to hunt out and destroy such pirates would have behind it a strong backing of public opinion throughout the world."

71 Ibid.; and PRO: ADM 116/3522/MO4769/37, Chief of Naval Staff memorandum, 1 September, 1937.

72 Adamthwaite, *France*, pp. 58-59.

73 PRO: FO 371/21358, pp. 119-124, Eden to Lloyd Thomas, 26 August, 1937.

74 Ibid.

75 PRO: CAB 24/271, pp. 80-115 *passim*, Draft notes of a meeting of Ministers, 2 September, 1937. This meeting opened with the news that the British tanker *Woodford* had been sunk by a submarine, presumably Italian.

76 PRO: FO 371/21358, pp. 216-218, Eden memorandum, 1 September, 1937. Even Chamberlain admitted that Mussolini's friendly letter of 31 July did not justify Britain's indulgence in his current conduct, which clearly indicates that there was no doubt in the prime minister's mind that Italy was responsible for the attacks.

77 PRO: CAB 24/271, p. 95, Draft notes of a meeting of Ministers, 2 September, 1937.

78 PRO: PREM 1/267, pp. 215-221 *passim*, Chamberlain note, Undated (probably 2 September, 1937). Chamberlain's pronouncement on the perceived weakness of the Axis bond is a good example of his wishful assessments that were not based on any solid evidence.

79 Chamberlain's policy almost parallels Eden's position as interpreted by Lord Halifax on 19 August. But Eden's requirements to recognize Italy's sovereignty in Abyssinia were more exacting than what Halifax had suggested. (See PRO: PREM 1/267, pp. 246-249, Halifax to Chamberlain, 19 August, 1937; and Avon, *Memoirs*, p. 516.)

80 Ibid. Mussolini's reference to slapping the King of England, noted earlier, indicates how flawed Chamberlain's judgement was regarding Italian fears of Britain. (See Sullivan, "A Fleet In Being," p. 118.)

81 PRO: PREM 1/267, p. 214, Syers memorandum, Undated (probably 7 September, 1937).

82 *DBFP*, XIX, No. 110, Eden comments on French note, 1 September, 1937.

83 *DBFP*, XIX, No. 120, Eden to Lloyd Thomas, 3 September, 1937; and Avon, *Memoirs*, p. 521. See also PRO: FO 371/21405, pp. 315-319, Mounsey to Lloyd Thomas, 8 September, 1937, for the "inside" story.

84 PRO: FO 371/21405, pp. 27-36, Minutes of Meeting, 6 September, 1937. The Admiralty had by now realized that the granting of belligerent rights was not politically possible.

85 Ibid. See also PRO: FO 371/21359, pp. 187-191, Mounsey memorandum, 6 September, 1937, for three alternative courses of action which the Admiralty had referred to the Foreign Office; that chosen by the Admiralty was less drastic than the one preferred by Eden in which all unidentified submarines would have been automatically attacked.

86 Bond, *Military Policy*, p. 195, describes Chatfield as "the only Service spokesman of first-rate ability on the Chiefs of Staff Committee throughout the 1930s," and Marder, "Royal Navy," p. 1336, notes that "he had character, charm . . . . administrative ability, professional knowledge—the lot."

87 ASME, SRD, Londra, 1937, 963/3, Riavvicinamento Italo-Britannico—Colloquio con Sargent, 25 August, 1937.

88 PRO: FO 371/21359, pp. 90-92, Sargent memorandum, 2 September, 1937; PRO: FO 371/21404, pp. 198-200, Vansittart memorandum, 3 September, 1937; ASME, SAP, US 55, 3, Atteggiamento del Governo britannico sulla situazione del Mediterraneo, 4 September, 1937; ASME, SAP, US 55, 3, Conversazioni Mediterraneo, 4 September, 1937; ASME, SAP, US 55, 3, Conversazioni Mediterraneo, 6 September, 1937. Germany, meanwhile, remained watchful but uninvolved. See PRO: FO 371/21405, p. 257, Eden to Ogilvie-Forbes, 3 September, 1937; and *DGFP*, III, No. 413, Woermann to Foreign Ministry, 3 September, 1937.

89 Ciano, *Diary*, p. 9.

90 Ibid.

91 The claim of Eden's prior knowledge is cited in *DBFP*, XIX, No. 122 fn. It is also made by Stephen Roskill, *Naval*, p. 385, no friend of Eden's, and was picked up by Jill Edwards, *British Government*, p. 124. All of these claims are based on a reference in Peter Gretton's article, "The Nyon Conference—the naval aspect," *The English Historical Review*, 90, 1975, p. 107. Gretton states that the Admiralty "had received indications that the conference had already achieved its purpose," but he does not give a date as to when the Admiralty had such knowledge or whom they advised. Therefore, while Gretton's comment suggests prior knowledge, it certainly does not confirm it. The only fairly clear statement that Gretton makes in this connection is that a signal was received (in Geneva?) from London on 14 September "saying that Italian submarines had been ordered to break off all offensive action." Apart from the fact that by 14 September the conference was over, if Gretton is referring to a dispatch sent that day by the director of naval intelligence to the British delegation in Geneva (PRO: ADM 116/3523/Case 4684, Vol. 2, D.N.I. to British Naval Delegation, 14 September,

1937.) he has quoted it inaccurately. This dispatch only reported that Italian submarines in the Aegean patrol had been ordered to suspend offensive operations. Gretton could well have other information that supports a claim of Eden's prior knowledge, but considering that his article contains numerous factual errors, it is not possible to accept his vague claim, as others have done, without more proof than he has provided.

92 *DBFP*, XIX, No. 126, Ingram to Eden, 7 September, 1937; for the text of the Soviet note, see *DBFP*, XIX, No. 127, Ingram to Eden, 7 September, 1937. Neither of the Soviet ships sunk was involved with Spain; one was destined for Egypt, the other for France.

93 Toynbee, *Survey*, II, p. 345.

94 Ibid. Ciano's apparent assumption that the conference would not proceed may have been based, in part, on the way in which the significance of Italy's presence at the conference had been stressed to Crolla in London.

95 *DBFP*, XIX, No. 128, Ingram to Eden, 7 September, 1937.

96 *DBFP*, XIX, No. 130, Eden to Ingram, 7 September, 1937; and PRO: FO 371/21405, pp. 288-291, Eden to Ingram, 7 September, 1937.

97 Vansittart was not as sanguine about holding the conference without Italy as was Eden. Discussing alternative control methods, he wrote that they would unlikely be reviewed, "because there is unlikely to be a conference." (PRO: FO 371/21359, p. 191, Vansittart memorandum, 7 September, 1937.) See also PRO: FO 371/21405, p. 263, Ingram to Sargent, 7 September, 1937 (*DBFP*, XIX, No. 129.); and PRO: FO 371/21405, p. 264, Vansittart to Ingram, 7 September, 1937 (*DBFP*, XIX, no. 133.), for Ingram's tentative suggestion for a move to the Non-Intervention Committee and for Vansittart's sharp, quick rebuff. The Italian and German notes of refusal are on *DBFP*, XIX, No. 147, Ingram to Eden, 9 September, 1937; PRO: FO 371/21405, pp. 302-304, Ingram to Eden, 9 September, 1937; and *DGFP*, III, No. 417, Memorandum to the British and French Embassies, 9 September, 1937.

98 NC 18/1/1019, Chamberlain to his sister, Ida, 7 September, 1937. Chamberlain's attitude was remarkably casual, unless he already knew that Ciano had called off the submarines three days earlier.

99 *DBFP*, XIX, No. 134, Eden memorandum, 7 September, 1937. PRO: FO 371/21359, pp. 167-170, contains a Foreign Office review of the legal implications of imposing submarine controls without Italian participation. This study concluded that the supression of piracy was a paramount international obligation, and any country that failed to meet this obligation had no right of action against countries that did so, even if she suffered damages as a result.

100 PRO: CAB 23/89, pp. 135-197, Cabinet Conclusions 34(37), 8 September, 1937. This was the first full cabinet in six weeks, during which time the challenge to Britain by both Japan and Italy had sharply increased. If anything, the Japanese problem was more acute, but the cabinet relegated it to a sub-committee in order to deal with the Italian problem that had to be faced in Nyon two days later.

101 Ibid., pp. 155-157.

102 Ibid., p. 156.

103 Ibid. See also AVON 2/18-25, Eden to Chamberlain, 14 September, 1937, for Eden's post-conference pride at having kept the Soviets out, despite his arguments in their favour at this cabinet meeting.

104 Ibid., p. 165; and Pratt, *East of Malta*, p. 90.

105 Ibid., pp. 167-168; and Pratt, *East of Malta*, p. 90.

106 Ibid., pp. 169-170; and Pratt, *East of Malta*, p. 90.

107 Middlemas, *Diplomacy*, p. 131.

108 Avon, *Memoirs*, p. 523.

109 PRO: PREM 1/360, p. 64, Chamberlain to Cleverly, 10 September, 1937.

110 PRO: PREM 1/360. p. 63, Cleverly to Hoyer Millar, 13 September, 1937; and PRO: PREM 1/360, pp. 56-59, Hoyer Millar to Cleverly, 14 September, 1937. In fact the Foreign Office had effectively quashed this possibility on 7 September (PRO: FO 371/21405, p. 264, Vansittart to Ingram, 7 September, 1937.) and thereafter any reference to the Non-Intervention Committee was a non-starter with the British. Short of total failure at Nyon, it is doubtful that even Chamberlain could have resurrected this option.

Chapter Four

The Conference

Little time was wasted in preparing conference strategy. By the morning of 10 September, the British and French delegates had agreed on an agenda to focus the talks strictly on stopping the submarine attacks; and the proposals they tabled that afternoon at the first session were essentially those approved by the British cabinet on 8 September.[1] Indeed, Anthony Eden made certain that it was the British course that was followed. The French reported that the foreign secretary insisted at their preliminary meeting that a quick agreement had to be obtained on specific measures to stop the submarine attacks, and the order of the day was to be strictly limited to this single question. In addition, the British delegation suggested that a system of patrols be recommended to the conference as the best means of protection against the attacks.[2] This last recommendation was not new to the French, their cabinet had discussed a similar plan three days earlier.[3] On the one hand, Eden seemed to be correct in his assessment that the French were looking for a lead from Britain, and "would be ready to fall in with any course of action we (Britain) proposed, provided we showed that we knew our own mind."[4] But the French were not the quiescent junior partners that Eden's comment might suggest; Yvon Delbos, the French foreign minister, was to play an important part in the conference and was the key representative in the later negotiations to bring Italy into the accord. Notwithstanding the prominent roles that Britain and France were to play at the conference in the absence of Italy and Germany, the Axis powers were never far from their thoughts.

This concern about giving the absent Italians and Germans a sense of being involved in the conference prompted the Anglo-French organizers to send conciliatory notes to Rome and Berlin shortly before the first session began. These expressed regret that the two governments were not represented at Nyon and undertook to keep them informed of the conference's progress.[5] In sharp contrast to the friendly tone of the mesages from Nyon, the state-controlled press in Italy reflected that country's hard-line attitude: articles denounced the conference as useless without Italy, and charged the Soviet Union with trying to divide the

European powers.[6] In an attempt to fashion reality out of hope, some Italian correspondents even claimed that the conference's deliberations would be "submitted to Rome and Berlin for direct consideration."[7] Although this placed a very generous interpretation on the Anglo-French undertaking, it came close to capturing the sense of some ideas expressed on 8 September at the cabinet meeting in London. At that time, Eden had accepted a proposal that Italy should be kept informed "with the hope that she would accept" the conference's decisions.[8] Despite his anti-Italian reputation, Eden expanded on this suggestion and recommended that it would be best if Italy were advised before final conclusions were reached, as otherwise she would complain "that she was being presented with a *fait accompli*."[9] This would have been a major concession to Italy on Eden's part, but instead of following this lead Chamberlain suggested that Italy be advised in advance of the conference as to what was proposed. Nothing came of this idea, the discussion moved to other matters, and Eden was left to follow whatever course he chose.[10] In any case, such considerations were of limited concern at Nyon. The flow of events overtook the diplomats, and the remarkable speed with which agreement was reached inevitably left the Italians outside looking in until after the conference had effectively completed its work.

The brisk pace of the conference was evident at the opening public session, in which delegations from Great Britain, France, Yugoslavia, Greece, Turkey, Egypt, Bulgaria, Romania and the Soviet Union took part, in the late afternoon of 10 September.[11] Eden emphasized the Anglo-French alliance by leading the other delegates in the unanimous appointment of Delbos as conference chairman.[12] The brief public session ended with three speeches: Delbos spoke of the need to act quickly to end the intolerable situation in the Mediterranean; Maxim Litvinov, the Soviet foreign minister, attacked an un-named power for her illegal activities in the Mediterranean; and Eden emphasized that the absent invitees would be kept informed, in the hope that they would participate in any proposed scheme.[13] Despite the crocodile tears shed by Eden and Delbos over the absence of certain countries, the decision by Italy not to attend—a decision followed by Germany—was a major tactical error on her part and contributed immeasurably to the success of the conference.[14]

The choice of Yvon Delbos as conference chairman might have been seen as a generous gesture on Britain's part, but as the conference progressed it became clear that Delbos' response to the cross-currents of national self-interest and shared fears that lay behind the debate was far superior to the oddly gauche reactions from Eden.[15] Delbos' appointment also had special implications in Britain and France. It would be better for Britain's future relations with Italy if Eden did not take an aggressive part in what Italy perceived to be an anti-Italian conference, while Delbos could help to heal political differences at home with a strong performance at the conference, since both the right-wing and left-wing elements of the French press were united in their support of the Anglo-French efforts at Nyon.[16] Accordingly, Britain and France seemed to have reached a complete understanding before meeting the other delegations; Eden would carry the debate on the floor and Delbos would use the power of the chair to direct the debate and to ensure that key conclusions were made. It was this mutual co-operation that assured the success of the conference.

The conference itself had all the elements of a three-act play: the stage was set at the first private meeting in the early evening of Friday, 10 September; the climax occurred later that evening in a reported diplomatic altercation between the eastern Mediterranean states and the Soviet delegation; and the denouement was confidently played out at the second session on 11 September. At that time, a new plan was adopted; the Soviet and Balkan delegates were reconciled; and Eden and Delbos were assured of success in their plan to stop the Mediterranean attacks. The minutes of the meetings emphasize the leading roles played by France, Britain and the Soviet Union, but this is somewhat misleading. The ultimate success of the conference hinged on the part played by the smaller nations who were instrumental in placing the control of the Mediterranean in Anglo-French hands and, in so doing, excluded the Soviet fleet from the Mediterranean. Whether these nations were improvising or following a script is unclear.[17]

At the beginning of the conference, Eden had three goals in mind: to stop the submarine attacks; to try to block the Soviet fleet from the Mediterranean, as recommended by Chamberlain; and to keep a side door open through which Italy could be brought into the

agreement, "the earlier the better."[18] This latter objective required Eden to do all in his power to ensure that nothing was agreed to at Nyon that would injure Italian sensibilities, other than the obvious injury of having their covert submarine campaign brought to a halt. The way in which events developed at Nyon, however, cause some problems of analysis, particularly with reference to two principal points: the recommendation of designated patrol areas for individual countries and the intention to include the Soviet fleet in the patrols. Both may have been deliberate moves designed to win control of the Mediterranean patrols for the Anglo-French fleets.

On 1 September, an Admiralty plan recommended "intensive operations" in the areas of attacks and confidently predicted that it should not be too difficult "to find and sink submarines in these areas."[19] By the time the Admiralty and Foreign Office officials met on 6 September, a French plan had been received calling for collectively organized defensive measures which would "involve mutual assistance against attacks."[20] But the Admiralty rejected the French concept of zones. They stressed that there should be "no division into national areas" and that warships should be free to operate throughout the Mediterranean with the individual right to sink hostile submarines. A short-term anti-Italian bias was behind this opposition which was based on the fear that, given the chance, Italy would continue to launch attacks within her zone.[21] By the next day, however, it was apparent that Italy was unlikely to be present at the conference, in which case a system of zones might work. Although the Admiralty still thought it "most undesirable to allocate *publicly* (emphasis added) any particular area to any one country," they now planned to allocate the eastern Mediterranean to the Soviet, Greek, or Turkish navies.[22] This was the plan approved by the cabinet on 8 September, even though its potential efficiency was questioned when it was admitted that the small countries "would be unlikely to serve any useful purpose."[23] Thus, the contradictions inherent in the Admiralty's plan for multi-national patrol zones make it difficult to judge if this was their actual choice for policing the Mediterranean.

On the other hand, the proposal to invite Soviet naval forces to take part was even more remarkable. The Admiralty's support of the Nationalist cause has already been noted.

As a result, their casual statement that "The Russian Navy might . . . be asked if they were prepared to watch any area of the Aegean" appears to be completely at odds with their most cherished principles.[24] It also placed Eden in a contradictory position. At the beginning of the cabinet meeting on 8 September, he almost apologized for his failure to keep the Soviets out of the conference, yet later in the same meeting he supported the proposal to ask the them to take part in the Mediterranean patrols.[25] Inviting Soviet warships into the Mediterranean was a far more serious action than inviting Soviet diplomats to Nyon, yet Eden accepted the first proposal and deplored the second. In addition, the foreign secretary's ready acceptance of the Soviets on 8 September is totally at odds with his boast less than a week later, on 14 September, that "most important of all we have managed to keep the Russians out of the Mediterranean."[26] The only reasonable explanation for the Admiralty's reversal of policy and for Eden's contradictory statements to cabinet is that the threat of a Soviet presence in the Mediterranean was being used deliberately as the most effective means to encourage the eastern Mediterranean countries to accept total Anglo-French control of the anti-submarine patrols. The manner in which the Nyon meetings developed lends support to this theory.

Eden opened the first session on the evening of 10 September by presenting the Anglo-French scheme of patrol zones—Britain and France in the western basin and Yugoslavia, Greece, Turkey and the Soviet Union in the eastern.[27] In addition, his recommendation to the delegates not only called for these specific allocations to individual countries, but it also anticipated that the details of the plan would be published at the end of the conference "as an indication of the intentions of the participating powers."[28] This would certainly have put everyone—the Nyon powers and the Axis powers—on notice as to where each country stood and thus added to the pressure on the small countries to avoid this unwanted publicity. Then Eden added another cost to the delegates' participation: he indicated that Britain and France estimated they would require forty to fifty vessels to patrol their zone in the western basin.[29] The small eastern states could assume that they would be expected to match this commitment, with the implied risk in the background that the Soviets might step in to make up any deficiencies on their part. At the same time, Britain had no intention of

giving the Soviets a free hand in the Mediterranean and almost simultaneously Eden adamantly opposed Litvinov's call for an international naval force.[30] Eden's argument that an international navy could not act quickly enough rings false when compared with the cautious approach recommended by the Anglo-French forces the next day. His real fear was likely that the Soviet forces might have acted too precipitously. Which makes it clear that, from Eden's viewpoint, a Soviet presence in an international fleet would have been a nightmare: there would have been a high risk of a Soviet-Italian confrontation; it would have put paid to any chance of achieving Anglo-French control; it would have made an accommodation of Italy impossible; and it would have breached Britain's long-standing opposition to a Soviet role in the Mediterranean.

Eden's deliberate attitude can be seen in other instances as well. Before the conference, at meetings in London on 17 August and 6 September, he strongly supported suggestions that any unidentified submarines encountered in the Mediterranean should be attacked and sunk.[31] There is little similarity between that decisive approach and the very cautious attitude he adopted at Nyon. The initial Anglo-French proposal was criticized by the other Nyon delegates as being weak and tentative, because it incorporated a technical definition of an illegal submarine attack from the 1930 Treaty of London.[32] On the other hand, Eden refused to accept a simple formula from the Romanian delegate which stated that any attacking submarine would, in turn, be counter-attacked, even though the foreign secretary, as noted earlier, had fully subscribed to this type of action in the past. Eden could have mustered a reasonable defence of the Nyon formula—it was perfectly logical in the Nyon document to refer back to an earlier international agreement which had been signed by most European countries, including Italy. But he did not do so. Instead, he cited completely irrelevant arguments that indicated an unwillingness to confront logically the case that was made for a stronger wording.[33] The only reasonable explanation for the foreign secretary's obscure defence is that he had to avoid any admission that Britain and France did not intend to accept publicly an absolute obligation to take definitive action against Italy. They did not wish to be placed in the position of having to attack an Italian 'pirate' submarine. This was a

diplomatic ploy to reassure Italy that only technical considerations were involved, so as to be able to deal with a reasonably unruffled Mussolini after the conference. Using the facade of a technical conference to avoid antagonizing Italy may not have been an obvious form of appeasement, but the democracies were allowing her to escape the international condemnation she deserved. It should also be noted that the original concept of a technical conference was Eden's and it was at his insistence that the principle was retained.

In addition, the concept of the conference as a technical exercise cut both ways; it also had its uses when Britain and France dealt with the other Nyon participants. From the first mention of a Mediterranean conference, Eden had stressed its technical nature with the obvious intention of raising it above the common scrum of international politics.[34] It was, therefore, almost a question of subterfuge that the political decision to invite Italy to patrol the Tyrrhenian Sea was introduced to the meeting by the conference's chief technician, Lord Chatfield, practically as an afterthought.[35] There can be little doubt that Chatfield had been chosen to give this very political manoeuvre a false technical veneer and thus make it more palatable to the other delegations who would not otherwise welcome the criminal joining the police force.

Delbos' promise at the end of the first session that the British and French delegations would hold themselves available for discussions has all the earmarks of a tactical withdrawal.[36] It was probably intended to get the debate off the conference floor so that the critics of the Anglo-French plan could be dealt with individually. The small powers, feeling the full impact of the responsibilities that were being placed on them and the anxiety caused by the possibility of having the Soviet fleet in their waters, would have needed reassurance. According to Eden, these informal discussions also made evident the underlying tensions between the eastern Mediterranean states and the Soviet Union, and produced a crisis that he feared would doom the conference "with most unhappy consequences."[37] Although the conference's success depended on overcoming potential differences among the participants by focussing on their common distrust of Italy, it soon appeared that the small states' distrust of the Soviets was equally important.

It is possible to suggest at least three objections that the small powers would have had to the Soviet presence in the patrol scheme. Firstly, Soviet warships would have had to be allowed to make regular passages through the Turkish-controlled straits linking the Black Sea and the Mediterranean; secondly, her warships would have operated among the Greek islands; and thirdly, the Soviets would have required servicing facilities in the ports of the participating Mediterranean countries. This would have destroyed the long tradition that Soviet warships had no place in the Mediterranean. The British, who were as proprietorial about the Mediterranean as Mussolini, had long staunchly supported this principle, which makes Eden's claim that he was surprised at the strength of anti-Soviet feeling appear to be either naive or Machiavellian.[38]

Since the confrontation between the eastern Mediterranean countries and the Soviets took place during the informal sessions, the circumstances are unclear. However, it should be noted that Eden is the only witness that recorded this altercation.[39] In contrast, Italy's contacts among the Nyon delegations did not mention a split between the Mediterranean states and the Soviet Union, even though it probably would have enhanced their standing with Italy to have done so. Instead, they reported that Greece and Yugoslavia were doubtful about the Anglo-French plan and were reluctant to participate in the patrols because of the political responsibility they would have to assume and the costs they would have to bear.[40] This suggests that the scheme proposed by Britain and France deliberately placed the small states in a position which forced them to do something the major powers would not, or could not, do themselves: exclude the Soviets from the scheme without causing them to leave the conference. At the same time, this gave the major powers the opportunity to rationalize a change of plan that would give them control of the patrols, and more importantly, control of the subsequent negotiations to bring Italy into the accord.

Once the small states had opted out of the patrol scheme, Britain and France moved quickly to fill the void. Eden gave full credit to France for her "splendid contribution" of additional destroyers that enabled the Anglo-French partnership to make an offer to assume responsibility for the entire Mediterranean.[41] In one stroke this initiative had removed all

concern with zones, ill-assorted naval forces, and the Soviet Navy. Yet none of this appears, even by reference, in the minutes of the second private session that opened late in the afternoon of 11 September. On the surface at least, the diplomatic initiative was now held by the Balkan countries. Prompted by the Anglo-French move, the Yugoslavian delegate, on behalf of the Balkan Entente, called on Britain and France to accept responsibility for patrolling the entire Mediterranean.[42] This artifice allowed Britain and France to be seen as coming to the aid of the smaller nations and not as imposing their will on the conference. Finally, with respect to the Aegean, Britain and France reserved the right to summon Soviet assistance if required. Thus national pride was preserved all around.

The balance of the meeting dealt with housekeeping matters—wording amendments and arrangements for signing the agreement. There were, however, two points in the discussion worth noting. Eden introduced an amendment designed to emphasize that the patrol routes would only affect the main commercial shipping lines, in order not to alarm unnecessarily "*les milieux maritimes*" by giving the impression that coastal routes were also covered.[43] Obviously, the only country that could have been alarmed was Italy. In addition, Delbos obtained Litvinov's grudging agreement that Britain and France, who were charged with the responsibility for launching counter-attacks, must operate on a practical, not a theoretical, basis.[44] Litvinov's capitulation highlighted the fact that the Soviet Union had lost her bid to punish Italy. It would have been clear to him that once Britain and France had gained control of the anti-submarine patrols, as the new policemen of the Mediterranean, they were not planning to dispense harsh justice. In any confrontation with Italy their response would obviously be tailored to fit both the specific circumstances and their long-term diplomatic objectives.

The first reactions to the agreement, by Chamberlain in London and Mussolini in Rome, misinterpreted the results as a strong stand against Italy. Chamberlain was particularly pessimistic: he noted that while Britain "has had a great success at Nyon . . . it has been at the expense of Anglo-Italian relations which have gone right back."[45] The prime minister also saw the apparent success at Nyon as a personal victory for Eden; and this is clear in his letter

congratulating the foreign secretary on "an admirable piece of work which has deservedly increased your own reputation."[46] At the same time, Chamberlain distanced himself from his foreign secretary in a manner inconsistent with his congratulations, but totally in keeping with his true feelings. Despite his expressed concern with what he believed to be the precarious state of Anglo-Italian relations, the prime minister was in no hurry to raise this concern with Eden. He suggested instead, that they could discuss matters when "opportunity offers" and he urged Eden not to hurry back to London in view of his interrupted vacation.[47] Considering Chamberlain's approach to the Italian embassy; his letter to Mussolini; and his decision to share his foreign policy thoughts with Halifax, but not Eden; he obviously preferred to operate as his own foreign secretary.

Eden, by contrast, was too buoyed up by recent events to be conscious of Chamberlain's negative feelings. His report to the prime minister expressed his concern with Italy's potential reaction, but he noted that an area had been reserved for Italy, which had not been part of the plan approved by cabinet on 8 September.[48] Accordingly, the reservation of the Tyrrhenian Sea for Italy had obviously been agreed on with France, between the time that Italy's decision not to participate had been received and Lord Chatfield's announcement of this plan at the first session. Eden explained that they did not expect Italy to accept this offer, it was only intended as an opening bid for Italy's co-operation.[49] And given Italy's past *mania di grandezza*, her reaction to an offer the Italians described as equivalent to "policing the routes between Venice and Trieste" was certain to be negative.[50] But Eden was not concerned. Even though Nyon had totally failed to bring Italy to justice, he still believed it had demonstrated that it was time for the democracies to "make themselves felt in Europe," and come what may, they could face any rough weather that Rome might choose to send.[51] Given the misleading euphoria generated at Nyon, Eden's tough, take-it-or-leave-it stance is understandable, but logically he should have known that it could not be sustained once negotiations began to bring Italy into the Nyon fold.

In Rome, on the second day of the conference, Mussolini and Ciano had assessed the Nyon agreement in much the same way as Chamberlain—it was a slap in the face for Italy.

But by the evening of that second day, they had good reason to adopt a more positive view of developments.[52] This quick change in attitude resulted from the information provided by Renato Bova Scoppa, Italy's representative at Geneva, who had sources of information inside the Romanian, Bulgarian and French delegations at the conference.[53] While these sources may not have been infallible, they introduced some new perspectives—such as the report that Vansittart had been sent to Nyon as a moderating force on Eden.[54] They also gave a different interpretation of motivations at the conference, citing Greek and Yugoslavian unwillingness to accept the political and financial responsibilities, rather than the conflict with the Soviet Union, as the reason that Britain and France were able to take total control.[55] Thus Italy had a good appreciation of what was taking place at Nyon as events unfolded, and in the first description of the final agreement he sent to Rome, Bova Scoppa was able to confirm that Italy would be invited to participate in the scheme.[56]

This message arrived in Rome at nine o'clock on the evening of 11 September. Ciano's diary entry for this day reads, in part: "The Duce is furious at the first news from Nyon. Bova's last telephone call soothed him a bit."[57] Mussolini's furious reaction probably stemmed from the fact that agreement had come so easily at Nyon without reference to Italy, while the soothing telephone call likely imparted the news contained in Bova Scoppa's report that arrived at eleven o'clock. This latter message included the Romanian delegate's very optimistic opinions about the conference's results. He claimed that the new arrangement constituted an explicit invitation for Italy to join the accord. In addition, he believed that the results augured well for future Anglo-Italian relations, and that the conference had proved to be a success for Italy and a defeat for the Soviet Union.[58] This reference to an Italian success appears to contradict Eden's claim of an Anglo-French success and the French perception that Nyon was "above all a victory for France."[59] But this is not necessarily accurate; each party was assessing a different perspective of the same event. Britain and France were correct, they did achieve success, the anonymous submarine attacks were stopped without Italy being accused of the crime, and this had always been their main objective. But their success at Nyon did nothing to curb Mussolini's aggressive policies, nor did it make Britain and France more

valuable as allies for either Germany or Italy.[60] Yet Antonesco was also correct—Italy had achieved success; by proxy, as it were. She had not been condemned by name; the decision to offer her a place in the Nyon patrols was a sign that Britain's attempt to court Italy would continue; and the negotiations for her participation in the Nyon scheme would provide Italy with an opportunity to dismantle the fragile alliance patched together at Nyon between the western democracies and the Mediterranean and Black Sea states.[61]

Throughout the Nyon discussions, the British and French delegations had also been preparing for the League of Nations assembly in the following week. As Eden put it, "the Far East and other aspects of the Spanish problem have perpetually been knocking at our door."[62] Once the Nyon plan was in place, therefore, the diplomats turned their attention to the problems they faced at Geneva. Thus, the discussions to bring Italy into the accord took the form of backdoor diplomacy done on the fly. Eden objected to the system, partly because it was impossible to maintain secrecy, but the method suited Ciano's purposes very well.[63] It allowed him to deal with diplomats who were distracted by other issues and who no longer had quite the same close co-operation that they had used so effectively at Nyon.

The first step in the process of dismantling the Nyon scheme came on 13 September with Ciano's negative reaction to the proposal that Italy accept the Tyrrhenian Sea as her patrol zone under the terms of the Nyon agreement.[64] The fact that only the non-strategic Tyrrhenian had been assigned to Italy evoked a plea from Maurice Ingram, Britain's chargé d'affaires in Rome, that Italian sensibilities should be taken into account, or they would not "play."[65] Ciano tried to force a better deal for Italy by a subtle approach. In his formal response on 14 September, he did not claim a right to participate, but instead he claimed that Italy had a right to parity with the Anglo-French navies.[66] This would have required an Italian presence in every Anglo-French patrol zone and not just in the Tyrrhenian. Ciano appeared to be over-confident that without Italy's co-operation, the scheme would fail and Britain and France would be held responsible.[67]

Ciano's diary entry on 15 September that the Italian note "is considered very clever" had no basis in fact, because on the same day, Bova Scoppa reported to Ciano that his note

had "not produced any particular impression" in Geneva.[68] This lack of any reaction, totally unexpected by the Italians, forced Bova Scoppa to approach directly the French delegation in order to determine what steps Italy should take.[69] He reported that Delbos and Eden did not consider Italy's note a refusal, but they awaited further clarification, and they would not make a counter-offer.[70] Bova Scoppa's claim that the Italian note had not been considered a refusal contradicted a French report to the British that he had been told they "could not do otherwise than regard it as a refusal to participate." Moreover, the French message said that they were not waiting for an Italian clarification, but they would listen to any comments that the Italians wished to make.[71] In addition, Delbos' reply included a phrase, "they were not asking for anything," which told Ciano exactly where matters stood.[72] This was deliberate mockery, because on 13 September, Ciano had rejected an offer by the British and French chargés in Rome to clarify the Nyon text with the brusque rejection that he "was not asking for anything."[73]

The first break in negotiations came on 17 September during the course of further meetings by the French delegation; first with the Italians and then with the British, and it was the democracies who wavered first.[74] Initially, the French remained adamant in the face of Bova Scoppa's argument that Italy had left the door open for further negotiations, but the Nyon powers "would not even touch the door handle."[75] This resolve did not last; soon the French, with British concurrence, deliberately gave the Italians the opening they sought: the democracies offered to send a written invitation to Italy to clarify her position when the text of the second Nyon agreement was delivered to Rome.[76] This was the opportunity that Italy needed; it gave her an excuse to make a second approach without having to lose face in doing so.[77]

The invitation to clarify the Italian position was delivered to Ciano on 18 September; it was non-committal and only offered to examine any positive observations that Italy might wish to present.[78] Ciano was equally non-committal in his response.[79] He did not exhibit any of the underlying anxiety that De Felice attributes to him and Mussolini at this time.[80] In fact, Ciano's convoluted reply on 19 September tried to appear indifferent as to whether or

not Italy became part of the Nyon pact—he still avoided any offer to participate, but continued to claim the right to parity. In order to settle the matter finally, the Anglo-French delegations decided to act on Ciano's vague requirements and so force him to make a decision.

Once again, the French were pitted against Bova Scoppa in these discussions. While he claimed to Rome that the French understood the "legitimacy of the Italian request" for parity, the French version of this meeting said otherwise.[31] This latter report indicates that a heated discussion took place over the question of parity. Bova Scoppa insisted that it was the prime consideration; the French argued that the concept of parity did not exist in Nyon's terms of reference. They agreed in principle, however, that if Italy had been part of the original discussions, she would have been placed on an equal footing with Britain and France.[32] In this regard, there can be little doubt that if Italy had attended the conference, a tripartite arrangement would have been the Anglo-French goal. The obstacles that might have been created by the Soviet delegation and others could have been substantial, but they likely could have been overcome by making the Anglo-French navies responsible for the Aegean patrols. It is unlikely that any of the small Mediterranean and Black Sea states would have willingly made an enemy of Italy by their opposition. Consequently, Britain and France now tried to incorporate the idea of granting Italy a role commensurate with her Mediterranean great power status in their final answer to Ciano on 20 September.

However, Eden and Delbos had to turn a couple of very sharp corners in order to accommodate their response to the form and tone of Ciano's second note. Firstly, although Ciano had not directly asked to participate, the Nyon powers had to acknowledge Italy's "desire to participate" in order to make their note both ope ative and final—it had to force Italy either to acknowledge or deny her wish to take part.[33] Secondly, they had to skirt Italy's demand for parity, even though this had been the single absolute precondition for Italian co-operation. To do this, the Nyon powers first soothed Italian susceptibilities through assurances that they had "never failed to recognize Italy's position as a great Mediterranean Power." Then to seal the accord, they simply assumed Italian co-operation and suggested that the three powers' naval experts meet in Paris to explore "practical modifications in the Nyon

arrangements."[84] Whatever might be said about the principles that lay behind this message, it is a masterpiece of diplomatic suasion that only left Ciano the choice of complete rejection or total acceptance. He chose the latter, and tripartite technical sessions began in Paris on 27 September.[85]

Britain had only played a secondary role in these negotiations, because as conference chairman, Yvon Delbos would have spoken for all Nyon signatories when dealing with Italy. On a practical level, co-operation was maintained between the British and French delegations. But there is an intrinsic weakness in any system in which one party handles all negotiations and the second party depends on it to report all the nuances of those discussions. Thus, it is difficult to determine the truth between what Bova Scoppa reported to Rome and what the French reported to the British. And on at least one occasion, the French delegation was reported to have accepted an Italian proposal before the British had come to a decision.[86] But there is no indication of any conflict between the allies, nor any occasion on which the British did not concur with French actions. Eden did not return to London until 22 September, so it was his policy that guided the British delegation during these negotiations. There is no suggestion that he referred any items to Chamberlain, nor was there any reason for him to do so; he was still following the guidelines that he had brought to Nyon. He had been able to achieve an agreement to stop the submarine attacks, Soviet warships had been kept out of the Mediterranean, and he had been able to bring Italy into the accord.

Even though this was the goal that Britain and France had sought, the fact that Ciano viewed these developments as a "fine victory" suggests that to the Italians it was another gain from appeasement.[87] This comment was typical of Ciano's egotistical boasting, but it contains an element of truth. For Italy to have escaped unscathed from her totally indefensible position was no small achievment. Most importantly, this had only been made possible by Anglo-French efforts to avoid a confrontation in the Mediterranean. Ciano could now expect Italy's requirements to be met, and she would have made the remarkable transformation from "suspected pirates to policemen of the Mediterranean—and the Russians . . . excluded."[88]

Yet this assumption of victory has not gone unchallenged. De Felice suggests that Ciano's claim is misleading—Italy had been forced to abandon her submarine campaign; the exclusion of the Soviets had not been an Italian accomplishment; and while Mussolini and Ciano had contained the Nyon problem, they may have exposed Italy to even greater dangers.[89] Although these points are valid, De Felice has not given Mussolini credit for his ability to bluff the democracies to the point that they feared to challenge Italy directly in the Mediterranean. Moreover, Nyon did not thwart Mussolini in his bid to interdict Soviet shipping. He planned to continue to attack shipments to Republican Spain by building up his air forces on Majorca and thus switch from sea attacks to continuous air raids on Republican ports.[90] Finally, it was important to Mussolini to have neutralized the implied challenge of the Nyon accord before he left on his state visit to Germany in late September. Not only would this have enhanced Italy's value as an ally in German eyes, but it also would have put Hitler on notice that Italy could still strike a deal with Britain and France on her own terms.[91]

On the other hand, Britain's conflicting objectives at Nyon—to stop the Italian submarine attacks and at the same time to placate the Italians—made it difficult for her to achieve any long-term victory. It is true that she easily won her primary objective: the submarine attacks were stopped; but then her secondary objective—the recovery of Italian friendship—became of prime importance. Since the manner in which strategic decisions were taken at Nyon without Italian consultation had enraged Mussolini, the only way to overcome this problem and win Italian co-operation was to abandon the independent stand taken at Nyon.

At this point, the negotiations were turned over to the Admiralty whose sole concern was to settle the distribution of patrol zones among the three powers in a manner that would bring Italy into the accord. Eden had already abandoned Nyon's problems in order to deal with other foreign policy matters. He apparently assumed that the technical approach, so valuable at Nyon, would be continued in the naval discussions at Paris. However, this was not to be; Italy's determination to fashion a belated political victory out of Nyon and the Admiralty's sympathetic response to Italian claims ensured the restoration of Italian prestige

at the expense of the Nyon signatories. Indeed, this situation gave the Admiralty an opportunity to practise the principles they had been preaching since 1935. It was their chance to recognize Italy's rightful position in the Mediterranean and to win her friendship.

Thus Britain's senior representative at the Paris talks, Admiral Sir William James, not only considered Italy's demands for control of a key section of the main shipping route as being "quite reasonable," he did so in response to Italian domestic factors. He believed that "their public opinion would not accept their exclusion from this route."[92] British public opinion was not a consideration. The Italians were not, however, to have it all their own way. The Soviets opposed any Italian control of the route through the Malta-Sicily channel. They were supported in their protest by Yvon Delbos, the French foreign minister, who was more conscious of the Soviets' feeling of betrayal by their Nyon allies.[93] Nevertheless, although the French prime minister, Camille Chautemps, had no illusions about Mussolini, he was "enough of a realist" not to lose an opportunity to reach an agreement with Italy.[94] He overruled Delbos, but he also convinced his foreign secretary that France had to support the signing of the Paris Naval Agreement which took place on 29 September, 1937.[95]

It is not clear what Eden's reaction was to the Paris agreement (which gave Italy forty percent of the total patrol area, including ten percent of the main trade route and key portions of the strategic Malta-Sicily channel), but the Foreign Office claimed to be satisfied.[96] On 2 October, Walter Roberts, the head of the League and Western Department, noted that the foreign secretary had approved the terms, and Roberts described the Paris results as "quite satisfactory" politically since they met Italy's need for prestige, but forced her to desist from further sinkings.[97] Considering the other problems that the Foreign Office faced, it is possible that they took the pragmatic view that with the attacks stopped, it made little difference what areas the Italians patrolled. The more responsibility they took, the less the load on the Anglo-French navies. But this satisfaction was not shared by the smaller Nyon powers, and in their frustration they turned on Britain as the party responsible for the Paris results.

By the beginning of October, the Greek and Turkish governments were worried that Italian patrols might control access to their ports.[99] This first reaction was followed on 5 October by a formal Greek protest that expressed their "extreme perturbation" at the news that Italian patrols would operate among the Ionian and Aegean islands, which action they described as contrary to their understandings at Nyon.[99] This forced Eden to join the debate again in an effort to soothe the troubled Greeks. But this time his diplomacy failed. His claims that their concerns had been kept in mind during the Paris talks and that the Italians had no wish to use Greek port facilities did not convince them. The Greeks refused to co-operate with the Italians in any way to make the scheme effective.[100] And Eden's claims, especially that the Italians had no wish to use Greek ports, were contradicted by the Italians. In mid-October, they entered two protests, the second one from Dino Grandi to the prime minister, over what they saw as Greek intransigence in refusing to co-operate with the Italian Navy.[101]

The disillusionment on the part of the other Nyon powers largely explains the long delay in obtaining their approval for the Paris Naval Agreement. By 23 October, the Foreign Office, concerned that this delay could become a new source of friction with Italy, had to force a response. Thus, stern messages were sent through the appropriate British ambassadors. In this regard, Roberts reflected that "the Balkan Entente are taking a most unhelpful attitude," and he knew that Britain could "hardly hope for any help from the French."[102] Robert's comments illustrate perfectly the level of frustration and mistrust that had developed among the Nyon allies as a result of Italy's inclusion in the accord. Moreover, Italy had frustrated French hopes for post-Nyon agreement on the withdrawal of volunteers from Spain by referring the matter to the ineffectual Non-Intervention Committee. Roberts believed that France was dragging her heels in order to put pressure on the Italians in the non-intervention discussions.[103] Eventually, the last of the grudging approvals had been returned by 1 November.[104]

Nyon also produced other Anglo-French problems. Under pressure from France, no map had been published of the Italian patrol zones, because Delbos feared this would produce

a public backlash over the size of the zones granted to Italy.[105] The Foreign Office agreed not to publish, although they considered some of the French arguments to be "frivolous."[106] However, the zones could not be ignored forever. An opposition member in the House of Commons tabled a question for 17 November requesting details of the Italian zones. The Foreign Office assumed that the information would be released. But after internal meetings, Eden's parliamentary under-secretary, Viscount Cranborne, was instructed to give an equivocal answer. He stated in the House that details of the zones could not be released unless all Nyon participants had first made a joint declaration to have the agreement published.[107] Cranborne's statement is an indication of how far the Nyon Agreement had sunk from its original place of honour. In order to appreciate how much of an embarrassment it had become, it is only necessary to compare this evasive response with Eden's intention in the first session at Nyon on 10 September to publish all details of the final plan when adopted.[108]

Within the Foreign Office, some still argued for publication, despite Eden's wish to avoid this step. On 1 December, although only the French were being consulted, Eden deliberately misled the House by stating that "the foreign governments concerned are being approached to obtain their views" about publishing the information.[109] Roberts came close to criticizing the foreign secretary when he noted the potentially awkward situation that could arise from Eden's use of the plural "governments" when the foreign secretary himself had ordered that the inquiry be limited to the French.[110] But Eden had accurately gauged the limits of parliamentary tenacity; he only had to stonewall the House one more time, on 20 December, and the question of the Italian zones was never raised again.[111] The issue had simply lost its value as a means of embarrassing the government, and the Nyon Conference was allowed to die a quiet death, alone and unmourned.

Notes

1 The discussions on the morning of 10 September at Nyon are summarized in PRO: FO 371/21405, pp. 68-69A, British Delegation, Geneva (hereinafter 'BDG') to Foreign Office, 9 September, 1937 (sic). The date is a typographical error for 10 September; in *DBFP*, XIX, No. 154 it is shown as 11 September with a footnote stating that the described events took place on 10 September.

2 *DDF*, VI, No. 421, Massigli au Ministère des Affaires étrangères, 10 September, 1937

3 *DDF*, VI, No. 404, Note du Cabinet de l'état-major général de la Marine, 7 September, 1937.

4 *DBFP*, XIX, No. 110, Notes by Eden, 1 September, 1937.

5 PRO: FO 371/21405, pp. 66-67, BDG to Foreign Office, 10 September, 1937. The vague undertaking was simply to keep the Italian and German governments "informed of (the) progress of (the) conference."

6 PRO: FO 371/21405, pp. 94-95, Ingram to Foreign Office, 10 September, 1937.

7 Ibid.

8 PRO: CAB 23/89, p. 155, Cabinet Conclusions 34(37), 8 September, 1937.

9 Ibid., pp. 155-156. It is not clear if Eden planned to give Italy any right of response to an advance notice of the conference's decisions.

10 Ibid.

11 Albania, also invited, did not attend as a result of Italian pressure.

12 PRO: ADM 116/3522, Case 4684, Vol. 2, Mediterranean Conference, Verbatim Report of the First Plenary Meeting (Public), 10 September, 1937. While undoubtedly pre-planned, Eden's move acknowledged France's role as the conference initiator, and in a minor way, might have served to make Delbos the focus of any Italian criticism. However, because of his position as chairman, it later placed Delbos in control of the post-conference negotiations with Italy designed to bring her into the accord.

13 Ibid. Such were the diplomatic niceties, that neither Italy nor Germany were specifically named in any of the speeches. Moreover, while Eden referred to the absent powers, his real

pitch was to Italy; Germany had no role to play in this scheme and it could have been an embarrassment had she offered to do so.

14 Germany's decision not to attend is on *DGFP*, III, No. 417, Memorandum to the British and French Embassies, 9 September, 1937. Although the Germans cited both the lack of response from the democracies over the *Leipzig* incident and the Soviet notes as reasons for not attending the conference, they would certainly have supported Italy with their presence, had she decided to come to Nyon. And even after Nyon's success, the advantage gained by Italy's absence was not clear to some British diplomats. On a dispatch from Ingram (PRO: FO 371/21405, p. 118, Ingram to Foreign Office, 10 September, 1937.), Sir George Mounsey noted on 18 September that "This shows that Italy was at first quite prepared to come in." To this, the eminently sensible Laurence Collier, head of the Northern Department, replied on 28 September: "Then the Russian note did us a good turn; for Italy would only have attended the conference with the object of wrecking it."

15 For example, see *DDF*, VI, No. 423, Conférence Méditerranéenne, Procès-verbal provisoire de la première séance (privée), 10 September, 1937, p. 736, for Delbos' deft rescue of Eden from a inept argument on which he was about to be challenged by the Romanian delegate; or *DDF*, VI, No. 426, Conférence Méditerranéenne, Procès-verbal provisoire de la deuxième séance (privée), 11 September, 1937, p. 749, for an example of Delbos' persuasive powers with the Soviets.

16 See PRO: FO 371/21405, pp. 277-278, Lloyd Thomas to Foreign Office, 8 September, 1937; and PRO: FO 371/21405, pp. 88-90, Lloyd Thomas to Foreign Office, 12 September, 1937, for reports on the French press.

17 For a broad, carefully written account of the conference and its background, see Avon, *Memoirs*, pp. 518-538. Eden is the only participant who refers to a conflict between the eastern Mediterranean countries and the Soviets on the evening of 10 September.

18 This final point had been part of Eden's recommendation to cabinet. (See *DBFP*, XIX, No. 134, Eden memorandum, 7 September, 1937.)

19 PRO: ADM 116/3522/MO4769/37, Director of Planning memorandum, 1 September, 1937.

20 PRO: FO 371/21405, pp. 27-36, Minutes of Meeting, 6 September, 1937. This was essentially the proposal for Franco-British collaboration in "zones of action" recommended to the French cabinet by Admiral Darlan of the French Navy the next day. Darlan also confirmed that France was interested in patrolling a zone from North Africa to the Balearics. (*DDF*, VI, No. 404, Note du Cabinet de l'état-major général de la Marine, 7 September, 1937.)

21 Ibid. This was an over-reaction on the Admiralty's part. Italy could not have afforded to carry out attacks in an area for which she had the responsibility.

22 See *DBFP*, XIX, No. 134, Eden memorandum, 7 September, 1937.

23 PRO: CAB 23/89, p. 156, Cabinet Conclusions 34(37), 8 September, 1937.

24 *DBFP*, XIX, No. 134, Eden memorandum, 7 September, 1937. It is hard to believe that the Admiralty really thought the Soviets might decline.

25 PRO: CAB 23/89, Cabinet Conclusions 34(37), 8 September, 1937, pp. 153 and 156.

26 AVON 2/18-19, Eden to Chamberlain, 14 September, 1937.

27 *DDF*, VI, No. 423, Conférence Méditerranéenne, 10 September, 1937.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid. This may have been a case of deliberate exaggeration; subsequently Britain and France only committed a total of sixty-four vessels to patrol the entire sea.(AVON 2/21, Eden to Chamberlain, 14 September, 1937.

30 Ibid.

31 PRO: FO 371/21357, pp. 201-210, Meeting of Ministers, 17 August, 1937; and PRO: FO 371/21359, pp. 187-191, Mounsey to Eden, 6 September, 1937. Eden was so cold-blooded at the August meeting that in response to Halifax's worry that an innocent submarine might be sunk, he responded "that there must always be the danger of sinking the wrong ship."

32 This proposal (which survived in the final Nyon document, see *British and Foreign State Papers*, Vol. 141, 1937 (London, 1950), pp. 520-527.) was that any submarine that attacked a ship in a manner contrary to the terms of the 1930 Treaty of London would be counter-attacked. Litvinov's argument that this meant a submarine could legally attack a ship if the ship's crew was allowed to leave in lifeboats was not supported by the meeting.

33 *DDF*, VI, No. 423, Conférence Méditerranéenne, 10 September, 1937. In response to the Romanian amendment, Eden ignored the fact that an 'attack' had to occur in order to precipitate a reaction, and instead implied that the Romanian wording would mean that a submarine could be sunk if it stopped a merchant ship to confirm its registration.

34 In addition to British documents, this concept of a technical conference also appears in Italian and German records. For example, see ASME, SAP, US 55, 3, Crolla to Ciano, 6 September, 1937; and *DGFP*, III, No. 413, Woermann to Berlin, 3 September, 1937. This approach was in opposition, however, to the original views of the French cabinet who at first thought that the conference should also have a political aspect. (See *DDF*, VI, No. 404, Note du Cabinet de l'état-général de la Marine, 7 September, 1937.)

35 Eden made much of Chatfield's 'stage presence' at Nyon, and the first sea lord undoubtedly added to the credibility of Eden's proposals. See particularly, Eden's glowing

comments to the prime minister on AVON 2/18-25, Eden to Chamberlain, 14 September, 1937.

36 *DDF*, VI, no. 423, Conférence Méditerranéenne, 10 September, 1937.

37 Avon, *Memoirs*, p. 526.

38 Ibid; and AVON 2/18-25, Eden to Chamberlain, 14 September, 1937. A factor not considered was the effect on Italy had the Soviet Union been included. The French had been advised on 11 September that Italy would have boycotted any scheme involving the Soviets and would have sunk any Soviet vessel interfering with the passage of Italian ships. (*DDF*, VI, No. 429, Note de la Délégation française à la S.D.N., 11 September, 1937.)

39 See AVON 2/18-25, Eden to Chamberlain, 14 September, 1937; and Avon, *Memoirs*, p. 526.

40 ASME, SAP, US 55, 3, 6326R, Bova Scoppa to Ciano, 11 September, 1937. In addition, Toynbee, writing shortly after the events, also makes no reference to anti-Soviet feelings but emphasizes Yugoslavia's inadequate navy and her fear of potential complications with Italy. (Toynbee, *Survey*, II, p. 347 fn.)

41 Avon, *Memoirs*, p. 526. Eden contrasts the generous French assistance at Nyon with Laval's "meagre efforts during the Abyssinian crisis" without acknowledging the significant difference between directly challenging Italy in 1935 and offering to patrol against submarines of unknown origin in 1937.

42 *DDF*, VI, No. 426, Conférence Méditerranéenne, 11 September, 1937. The Balkan Entente—Yugoslavia, Romania, Greece and Turkey—dated from 1934. The mutual support among these powers was evident throughout the conference.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

45 NC18/1/1021, Chamberlain to his sister, Ida, 19 September, 1937. In this letter, the prime minister expressed his innocent belief that the Italians "disliked the whole attempt to stop the submarine attacks" for which he had "little doubt that they were chiefly responsible.". By contrast, the French public had no doubt whatsoever: considering the 'unknown' source of the attacks, the Parisiens were referring to the ***Boulevard des Italiens*** as the ***Boulevard des Inconnus***. (Carlton, ***Eden***, p. 109.)

46 AVON 2/26, Chamberlain to Eden, 18 September, 1937. The degree to which Nyon enhanced Eden's reputation is clearly shown by the private comments made by Rex Leeper, a senior diplomat who was at Nyon. In May, 1937, he described Eden as being "as weak as water," but following Nyon, he thought that Eden was the "only member of the Cabinet with

any 'guts'." (Young, *Lockhart*, pp. 372 and 380.)

47 Ibid.

48 AVON 2/18-25, Eden to Chamberlain, 14 September, 1937.

49 Avon, *Memoirs*, p. 527.

50 *DDF* VI, No. 429, Note de la Délégation française à la S.D.N., 11 September, 1937.

51 AVON 2/18-25; Eden to Chamberlain, 14 September, 1937. Eden only made a brief reference to Germany in this letter, but his comment that "German political opinion will feel no enthusiasm for a Mediterranean controversy," gravely underestimated the subtlety of Nazi diplomacy in southern Europe.

52 De Felice, *Lo Stato totalitario*, p. 432, believes that Ciano's diary for this period is misleading, and that for weeks after Nyon, Mussolini's and Ciano's major pre-occupation was to find a way out of the blind alley in which they found themselves. He does not cite references for this gloomy picture of the Palazzo Chigi, but available documents favour Ciano's claim of a rapid reversal in Italian fortunes.

53 In his telegrams, ASME, SAP, US 55, 3, 6336R and 6354R, Bova Scoppa to Ciano, 11 and 12 September, 1937, Bova Scoppa identified two of his contacts—Antonesco from Romania and Momtchilov from Bulgaria—but not his French source. However, in a later dispatch (ASME, SAP, US 55, 3, 6439R, Bova Scoppa to Ciano, 15 September, 1937.), he noted that Jean Mistler had defended Italy's cause in a split among the French delegation, and the most likely person to tell him this would be the person who had done the defending.

54 ASME, SAP, US 55, 3, 6330R, Bova Scoppa to Ciano, 11 September, 1937.

55 See Avon, *Memoirs*, p. 526; and ASME, SAP, US 55, 3, 6326R, Bova Scoppa to Ciano, 11 September, 1937 for the conflicting views.

56 ASME, SAP, US 55, 3, 6326R, Bova Scoppa to Ciano, 11 September, 1937.

57 Ciano, *Diary*, p.12.

58 ASME, SAP, US 55, 3, 6336R, Bova Scoppa to Ciano, 11 September, 1937. Antonesco was playing both ends against the middle. While he gave support to the Italian cause that evening, on the previous day he had tried to force Eden to agree to take more drastic steps against the Italian submarines. (*DDF*, VI, No. 423, Conférence Méditerranéenne, 10 September, 1937.)

59 Avon, *Memoirs*, p. 528; and *DDF*, VI, No. 459, François-Poncet to Delbos, 16 September,

1937. This dispatch from Berlin provides a valuable reference to German reactions to Nyon from an experienced diplomat.

60 As an example of Mussolini's continuing aggression, in the immediate aftermath of the conference and while the results of the negotiations to add Italy to the accord were still ongoing, on 15 September, Ciano agreed to send two more submarines to Franco immediately, with two more to follow shortly. (Ciano, *Diary*, p. 13.)

61 A prescient French columnist anticipated what was to come when he wrote that "negotiations may be started which, little by little, will whittle away the effect." (PRO: FO 371/21406, p. 215, Lloyd Thomas to Foreign Office, 15 September, 1937.)

62 AVON 2/18-25, Eden to Chamberlain, 14 September, 1937.

63 Eden's objection is on ASME, SAP, US 55, 3, 6521R(?), Bova Scoppa to Ciano, 17 September, 1937.

64 PRO: FO 371/21405, pp. 135-137, Ingram to Eden, 13 September, 1937. (*DBFP*, XIX, No. 161.) This rejection should not have come as a surprise to the democracies; on 11 September, the French delegation were told in no uncertain terms that Italy would not adhere to the accord, unless she was given a role in the Mediterranean that was absolutely equal to that of Britain and France. (*DDF*, VI, No. 429, Note de la Délégation française à la S.D.N., 11 September, 1937.)

65 PRO: FO 371/21405, pp. 138-140, Ingram to Eden, 13 September, 1937. (*DBFP*, XIX, No. 162.) Their 'sensibilities' were a negotiating tool used by the Italians to bolster otherwise weak arguments or exposed diplomatic positions, of which this is a good example of the latter.

66 *DBFP*, No. 165, Ingram to Eden, 14 September, 1937.

67 Ciano, *Diary*, p. 12. There is no logical explanation for Ciano's absurd conclusion; the scheme was well on its way to becoming effective without Italy.

68 Ibid., p. 13; and ASME, SAP, US 55, Bova Scoppa to Ciano, 15 September, 1937.

69 ASME, SAP, US 55, 3, 6460R, Bova Scoppa to Ciano, 15 September, 1937. Protocol would require Bova Scoppa to deal with the French, since Delbos had been the conference chairman. In addition, since the Italians had a contact in that delegation, they may have believed that the French were more sympathetic to the Italian cause. According to one French memorandum, the British were prepared to resist any extension of Italy's role (*DDF*, VI, No. 453, Massigli to Delbos, 15 September, 1937.), although other documents do not indicate a single case where the British did anything other than follow the French lead.

70 Ibid.

71 PRO; FO 371/21406, 278-281, Stevenson memorandum, 15 September, 1937.

72 Ibid.

73 PRO: FO 371/21405, p. 137, Ingram to Eden, 13 September, 1937. (*DBFP*, XIX, No. 161.)

74 Reported in ASME, SAP, US 55, 3, 6518R, Bova Scoppa to Ciano, 17 September, 1937; *DDF*, VI, No. 494, Note de la Délégation française a la S.D.N., 27 September, 1937; and PRO: FO 371/21406, pp. 355-358, Stevenson memorandum, 17 September, 1937. There is an ironic element in the Italian dispatch. Bova Scoppa complained that when he argued that the Italian note was not a refusal, he was presented with copies of Italian newspapers whose headlines boasted of Italy's refusal to participate.

75 PRO: FO 371/21406, p. 357, Stevenson memorandum, 17 September, 1937.

76 *DDF*, VI, No. 494, Note de la Délégation française a la S.D.N., 27 September, 1937. This document indicates that it was Bova Scoppa who suggested this arrangement, which the French agreed to before checking with Eden. In his report (ASME, SAP, US 55, 3, 6518R, Bova Scoppa to Ciano, 17 September, 1937.), Bova Scoppa confirmed the French acceptance, but noted that Eden had not yet come to a decision. The second Nyon agreement dealt with surface and air attacks.

77 In De Felice's view (*Lo Stato totalitario* p. 433.), this was equivalent to throwing a rope to Ciano, who "clung to it with all his strength." Yet Ciano's subsequent actions did not reflect the desperation suggested by De Felice. Ciano even had sufficient confidence in his position that he ruffled a few feathers by publishing that it was the Nyon powers who had "made the first gesture." (Ciano, *Diary*, p. 14.)

78 *DBFP*, XIX, No. 171, Eden to Ingram, 17 September, 1937.

79 The text is given in ASME, SAP, US 55, 3, 1620/R/C, Ciano to London, Paris and Salamanca, 19 September, 1937 and PRO: FO 371/21406, pp. 327-328, Ingram to Eden, 19 September, 1937.

80 De Felice, *Lo Stato totalitario*, pp. 432-433. It is true that on 19 September Ciano noted the Duce's constant phone calls to check on developments (Ciano, *Diary*, p. 14.). But as a contrary example, Ciano's letter to Grandi on 18 September (De Felice, *Lo Stato totalitario*, pp. 435-436.), in which he requested an assessment of the British state of mind, was not at all urgent.

81 ASME, SAP, US 55, 3, 6582R, Bova Scoppa to Ciano, 20 September, 1937; and *DDF*, VI, No. 494, Note de la Délégation française a la S.D.N., 27 September, 1937.

82 *DDF*, VI, No. 494, Note de la Délégation française a la S.D.N., 27 September, 1937.

83 PRO: ADM 116/3523/Case 4684, Vol. 2, Eden to Ingram, 20 September, 1937. (*DBFP*, XIX, No. 180.) Ciano took exception to the quoted phrase, but he could not afford to make it an issue. (*DBFP*, XIX, No. 182, Ingram to Eden, 21 September, 1937.)

84 Ibid.

85 The basis of Italy's agreement is on *DBFP*, XIX, No. 185, Ingram to Eden, 21 September, 1937. For Bova Scoppa's comments, see ASME, SAP, US 55, 3, 6608R, Bova Scoppa to Ciano, 20 September, 1937. He urged acceptance of the Anglo-French offer, and claimed the French had told him that the Nyon plan could be adapted to the Italian viewpoint, but this had not been expressed in their note in order to avoid differences with the other Nyon signatories.

86 ASME, SAP, US 55, 3, 6518R, Bova Scoppa to Ciano, 17 September, 1937.

87 Ciano, *Diary*, p. 15.

88 Ibid.

89 De Felice, *Lo Stato totalitario*, p. 434.

90 This plan is mentioned in a letter dated 18 September from Ciano to Grandi which is cited in De Felice, *Lo Stato totalitario*, pp. 435-436. Ignoring this logical explanation in Ciano's letter for the build up of aircraft on Majorca, De Felice argues that the aerial reinforcements were in anticipation of a war with Britain and France.

91 While Italy's success in bending the Nyon agreement to meet her terms was not yet a fact, her plans to do so would have been shared with the Germans.

92 PRO: ADM 116/3523/Case 4684, Vol. 2, D.C.N.S. to the First Sea Lord, 28 September, 1937. James also criticized the Soviets, who were "contributing nothing," for their complaints about the concessions to the Italians. He overlooked the fact that if they had not been barred from the Mediterranean, the Soviets would have contributed willingly.

93 A reference to Delbos' intervention is on PRO: ADM 116/3523/Case 4684, Vol. 2, D.C.N.S. to the First Sea Lord, 27 September, 1937.

94 This assessment of Chautemps is on PHPP 1/19, Phipps to Eden, 30 September, 1937.

95 PRO: ADM 116/3523/Case 4684, Vol. 2, Phipps to Foreign Office, 29 September, 1937.

96 See Avon, *Memoirs*, p. 532, for Eden's reference to the Paris talks: "Mussolini was allotted his part and accepted it."

97 PRO: FO 371/21360, p. 131, Roberts memorandum, 2 October, 1937.

98 PRO: FO 371/21360, p. 132, Foreign Office memorandum, 2 October, 1937.

99 Ibid., p. 132; and PRO: FO 371/21361, pp. 227-230, Waterlow to Foreign Office, 5 October, 1937.

100 Eden's summary of these developments is on PRO: FO 371/21362, pp. 58-62, Eden to Phipps, 8 October, 1037.

101 PRO: FO 371/21362, p. 102, Foreign Office to Waterlow, 19 October, 1937.

102 PRO:. FO 371/21362, pp. 154-155, Roberts memorandum, 23 October, 1937.

103 Ibid. The only 'pressure' that was placed on Italy was that she could not offically join the Nyon patrols until all the Nyon signatories had approved the Paris agreement.

104 PRO: FO 371/21362, p. 158, Lampson to Foreign Office, 1 November, 1937.

105 PRO: FO 371/21361, pp. 234-239, Phipps to Foreign Office, 6 October, 1937.

106 Ibid. See Roberts memorandum dated 7 October, 1937, on Phipps dispatch.

107 PRO: FO 371/21364, pp. 262-263, Coulson memorandum, 16 November, 1937; PRO: FO 371/21364, p. 278, Coulson memorandum, 17 November, 1937; and H.C. Deb., Fifth Series, Vol. 329, Col. 374.

108 *DDF*, VI, No. 423, Conférence Méditerranéenne, 10 September, 1937.

109 PRO: FO 371/21364, p. 237, Coulson memorandum, 18 November, 1937; PRO: FO 371/21365, p. 178, Roberts memorandum, 30 November, 1937; and H.C. Deb., Fifth Series, Vol. 329, Col. 2045.

110 PRO: FO 371/21365, p. 345, Roberts memorandum, 18 December, 1937.

111 H.C. Deb., Fifth Series, Vol. 330, Cols. 1582-1583.

Chapter 5

Conclusions

The Nyon Conference had proved to be little more than a ripple on the mainstream of European diplomacy and its form was quickly subsumed into the broader current. But as an example of appeasement, it had underlying effects on European developments beyond the few days in which it had held world attention in mid-September, 1937. At first, Italy's agreement to join the Nyon patrols ended any risk of a Mediterranean confrontation. The hopes briefly raised in the democracies and the concerns briefly felt by the Axis powers swiftly subsided as both sides returned to the diplomatic manoeuvring at which Italy and Germany were so adept. By the end of September, the only visible consequence of the Nyon Conference was a negative one: disillusionment among Britain's Nyon allies as a result of the concessions awarded to Italy in the post-Nyon naval negotiations.

But in retrospect, the conference had achieved its principal objective: to stop the submarine attacks without seriously offending Italy.[1] For despite the rhetoric to the contrary, Nyon was conceived and executed as a measure to appease Italy while stopping the attacks by the carefully designated 'pirate' submarines. The achievement of this difficult task became the high point of Anthony Eden's career as Neville Chamberlain's foreign secretary. It marked the only time that Eden controlled Britain's foreign policy in the period from Chamberlain's accession to power in May, 1937, until he resigned as foreign secretary in February, 1938.[2] During this time, the major question that divided the two statesmen was Britain's policy towards Italy, and it was on this question that Eden eventually fell.

Although Chamberlain and Eden seemed to have been in agreement at the Imperial Conference in May that an approach would have to be made to Italy, there was a fundamental difference between them as to how and when this should be done. Chamberlain was anxious to restore Anglo-Italian relations to their pre-Abyssinian level of friendship, and to achieve this he was prepared to grant *de jure* recognition of Italy's conquest of Abyssinia in return for something "substantial" from Italy.[3] Eden, on the other hand, was not prepared to be seen as chasing after Italy, he was reluctant to recognize Italy's Abyssinian conquest, and

he distrusted Italy's future performance under any guarantees she might provide.[4] But these differences had remained dormant during the period leading up to Chamberlain's exchange of letters with Mussolini at the end of July that put the prime minister in firm control of Britain's foreign policy.

Eden might well have continued in a secondary foreign policy role to Chamberlain had not the submarine attacks in the Mediterranean given him an opportunity to regain his lost stature. At the very time when he was a lone voice arguing against the tenor of the proposed Anglo-Italian talks, the Italian submarine attacks and the French suggestion of a conference to reduce tensions in the Mediterranean combined to give him an opportunity to regain control of British foreign policy. In doing so, his role at the Nyon Conference and the conference itself have earned themselves the reputation of being "an emphatic declaration of western resolution" against the dictators.[5] While it is true that a review of the conference's preparations and meetings confirms its anti-aggression principles, it also indicates that every effort was taken by Eden to avoid any act or statement that would have alienated Italy. Apart from the action to stop the attacks by anonymous submarines, all the other aspects of Nyon were designed to complement Britain's appeasement policy towards Italy.

In order to identify the form of appeasement represented at Nyon, it is necessary to recall why the conference was originally held. From almost the beginning of the Spanish Civil War, Britain and France had supported a non-intervention policy in order to prevent the war from spreading beyond Spain's borders. Therefore, the pirate submarine attacks were doubly dangerous, they themselves represented a spread of the war and they could, in turn, easily provoke an incident that would bring another country into the conflict in Spain. Consequently, the British and French governments could not continue to tolerate this form of international terrorism in which their ships were being attacked and their nationals killed; their people would not stand for it, particularly when the culprit was widely known to be Italy.[6] Thus Britain and France had no choice but to act, but the French government's original goal must be kept in mind: they wanted to avoid being placed in the "difficult position of having to pronounce on the Spanish complaints against the Italians" at the League of Nations.[7]

France sought a meeting with Italy and Britain in order to avoid a confrontation with the Italians—both in the Mediterranean and at Geneva—not to provoke one.

Once the idea of a Mediterranean conference was adopted, it was Eden who took the lead in ensuring that Italian sensibilities were recognized. Even though France had originally envisaged a tripartite meeting involving the democracies and Italy, once the scope of the meeting was extended to include other Mediterranean and Black Sea countries, France considered excluding Italy from the discussions. This would obviously have pointed the finger at Italy as the guilty party in the attacks, and it would have made it impossible to expect Italy either to accept or to take part in any solution that might be adopted. The price that Delbos eventually extracted from Eden in return for France's agreement to invite Italy was that Eden had to agree to invite the Soviet Union as well.[8] Accordingly, it was Britain who was responsible for Italy being invited to Nyon. Subsequently, it was primarily British Foreign Office officials who consistently urged Italy to attend the conference.[9] All this was in keeping with Chamberlain's wishes to re-establish friendly relations with Italy.

Faced with Italy's refusal to come to Nyon, Britain had to ensure that nothing occurred at the conference to upset Italy's *amour propre*. This made it even more important that the conference be conducted on a technical basis and that politics and past events not be discussed at the meetings.[10] Eden won this point, and this objective approach not only guaranteed that the conference's debates would focus on the major problem of stopping the attacks, it also avoided any anti-Italian outbursts that would have embarrassed Britain. Although the advantages of Britain's technical approach were obvious if Italy were going to be asked to join the accord later, it was not achieved without some minor opposition from the French who appeared to forget temporarily their original objective and wanted the conference to have a political aspect as well.[11] Eden's insistence on his plan was necessary if he was going to follow the line of appeasement with firmness that he employed at Nyon.

This technical approach was possible because of a prior technicality: the submarines making the attacks had always been carefully described as anonymous. Italy's own cover-up had made it possible for the Mediterranean powers to move against the 'pirate' submarines

without invoking any anti-Italian motives.[12] It was a game in which everyone knew precisely what unspoken truth lay behind the diplomatic clichés. But because Italy had placed herself in this indefensible position, it was critical that nothing be done at Nyon that would allude to Italy's discomfiture, much less attempt to exploit it. This made it necessary for Britain and France to gain control of whatever patrol system emerged from the conference. In this light, the original Anglo-French plan for patrol zones for each Mediterranean coastal country supplemented by the Soviet Navy can best be explained as a subtle threat designed to convince the smaller powers to accept the alternative of an all-encompassing Anglo-French system. There is nothing in the documents that even hints at such a plan; and Eden's expressions of surprise at the extent of anti-Soviet feelings, if honestly given by him, speak against this possibility.[13] Yet this theory would explain the otherwise inexplicable actions taken by Eden and the Admiralty which had the desired effect: the British and French navies were asked to take over joint control of the Mediterranean.

For Britain and France, this was the essential step; by taking control of the Mediterranean patrols, they could avoid any situations likely to produce a confrontation with Italy. They now had international approval to sink the 'pirate' submarines should the attacks resume, but they also had maximum flexibility as to how they would react in any given situation should this occur.[14] This gave a clear signal to Italy that draconian measures were not contemplated, and to soothe Italian fears further, Eden made it clear that the new measures would only apply to main shipping channels, not to Italian coastal routes.[15] Even then, Italy could not help but be offended by the smooth manner in which the conference delegates had reached their conclusions, and it was necessary for the democracies to reduce this sense of grievance as quickly as possible.[16]

This was achieved in two stages. Britain and France first gave in to Italian pressure and accepted Italy's demand for equal representation in the patrols as her price to join the accord. This diplomatic understanding was then turned over to the naval experts to transform it into a practical plan. Italy's participation in this second stage, however, turned a technical process into a political one. The Admiralty's representatives were not inclined to oppose Italy's

demands for control of key patrol areas that were certain to cause concern among Britain's Nyon allies. Indeed, Italian public opinion was an important consideration for the British representatives, which was in keeping with the pro-Italian approach promoted by the chiefs of staff.[17] Neither Chamberlain nor Eden appear to have had any direct involvement in the Paris naval discussions, although Chamberlain would not likely have been displeased with the results. On balance, it is difficult to see how Britain's response to the submarine threat could have been more scrupulous in respecting Italian sensibilities while halting the attacks before a confrontation with Italy became inevitable.

Once action had been taken at Nyon, however, the alliances that had been formed there quickly dissolved. And while the conference in its own right had no lasting effect on European developments, or even on Anglo-Italian relations, it was a turning point on the road to war. Coverdale notes that Nyon marked the end of European tensions over Spain as new crises pushed the civil war into the background.[18] And as attention moved from Spain to new threats posed by Germany in central Europe, changes occurred within the competing camps. The Axis powers had not been impressed by the cautious steps taken by the democracies at Nyon, and Italy quickly resumed her aid to Franco.[19] But this new show of force was misleading, because by now Italy's underlying military and economic weaknesses made it impossible for the Duce to remain independent of German influence. Less than two months after Nyon, the Germans took advantage of Mussolini's weaker position and forced him to abandon his "watch on the Brenner" and with it, any further influence in Austria's future.[20] This action ended Mussolini's role as a potential counterweight between Germany on the one hand and Britain and France on the other.

From the Anglo-French viewpoint, post-Nyon developments led to a weakening of the co-operation that had been achieved at Nyon and to new efforts by Britain to reach an accommodation with the Axis powers. Chamberlain, anxious to avoid being seen as forming alliances against the Axis, urged Eden to abandon his ties with the French in order to open the way for new discussions with Italy and Germany. This marked the beginning of Eden's decline as foreign secretary as he and Chamberlain became increasingly alienated over foreign

policy issues. The prime minister was eager to restore cordial relations with Mussolini in the face of Eden's arguments for caution. But given Eden's lack of support in cabinet and in the Foreign Office, it was a fight he could not win.[21] Consequently, following Nyon, and arguably as a result of Nyon, it was Chamberlain's views that began to dominate British foreign policy.

However, the most important factor to be considered in assessing the significance of the Nyon Conference is that, while it succeeded in stopping the submarine attacks, it did not improve the position of the democracies with respect to the Axis powers. Germany and Italy had clearly seen that even when Britain had definite knowledge of Italian attacks upon her shipping, she lacked the will to confront Italy and bring her to justice, or she feared the strategic consequences of doing so. From the meek responses shown at Nyon and the immediate rush to bring Italy into the accord, the Axis powers could assume that this was a true measure of future Anglo-French reactions to their transgressions. Therefore, while Nyon cannot be compared to the abject appeasement of Munich, it was an unacknowledged act of appeasement that only served to encourage the further acts of aggression by Germany and Italy that were to follow.

Notes

1 There was no suggestion in the documents reviewed that the Italians were particularly angered at having to stop the submarine attacks, especially after the close call with the *Havock*. What anger existed in Italy was directed at the manner in which effective action had been taken so swiftly at Nyon without any reference to Mussolini's government for their comments. Once this had been remedied by the naval talks in Paris, Anglo-Italian relations returned to the same uneasy status as in the early summer of 1937, before the exchange of the Chamberlain-Mussolini letters.

2 Eden's short time in charge of British foreign policy occurred in the prime minister's absence. In late August, Chamberlain was away from London, and when Eden made his mark at Nyon, he was essentially out of the reach of the prime minister.

3 AVON 13/123-125, Chamberlain to Halifax, 7 August, 1937.

4 PRO: PREM 1/267, pp. 246-249, Halifax to Chamberlain, 19 August, 1937.

5 Rose, "Resignation," p. 916, is but one of a number of similar descriptions.

6 Frank, "Naval Operations," p. 35. He suggests that even tourists in Italy were aware that Mussolini was sending submarines against the Spanish Republic, well before the campaign in August, 1937.

7 PRO: FO 371/21358, pp. 119-124, Eden to Lloyd Thomas, 26 August, 1937.

8 PRO: FO 371/21405, pp. 315-319, Mounsey to Lloyd Thomas, 8 September, 1937.

9 See, for example, ASME, SAP, US 55, 3, Conversazioni Mediterraneo, 6 September, 1937; and PRO: FO 371/21405, pp. 288-291, Eden to Ingram, 7 September, 1937.

10 ASME, SAP, US 55, 3, Conversazioni Mediterraneo, 6 September, 1937, confirms the importance that the Italians placed on the technical focus of the conference.

11 *DDF*, VI, No. 404, Note du Cabinet de l'état-major général de la Marine, 7 September, 1937.

12 See *DGFP*, III, No. 422, Forster to Foreign Ministry, 25 September, 1937, for a German evaluation of Franco-Italian relations which includes a comment about how France had been able to neutralize Italy without "having to take an open position against her."

13 See Eden's comments on AVON 2/18-25, Eden to Chamberlain, 14 September, 1937; and Avon, *Memoirs*, pp. 526 and 528.

14 See especially *DDF*, III, No. 426, Conférence Méditerranéenne, 11 September, 1937, for the broad understanding that Delbos won from Litvinov on the matter of a discretionary response.

15 Ibid.

16 The only reference that noted Italian anger towards the conference was Mussolini's outburst on the evening of 11 September, and even this was calmed down later that same evening. (Ciano, *Diary*, p. 12.)

17 See PRO: ADM 116/3523/Case 4684, Vol. 2, D.C.N.S. to the First Sea Lord, 28 September, 1937. See Pratt, *East of Malta*, pp. 87-88, regarding the chiefs of staff recommendations of 12 August and 21 September which even exceeded how far Chamberlain was willing to go for an Italian settlement.

18 Coverdale, *Italian Intervention*, p. 316.

19 Coverdale, *Italian Intervention*, p. 323.

20 See the meeting with Ribbentrop on LP15/148-158, Colloquio-Duce, Ciano, Ribbentropp(sic), 7 November, 1937.

21 See Peters, *Eden*, p. 294; Harvey, *Diaries*, p. 56; PRO:FO 800/274, pp. 325-331, Sargent to Phipps, 8 October, 1937; HNKY 4/29, Phipps to Hankey, 14 October, 1937; and PHHP 2/10, Sargent to Phipps, 15 October, 1937, for examples of the growing split between Eden on the one hand and the prime minister, the cabinet and the Foreign Office on the other.

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